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PAKISTAN'S TRADE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES WITH CARS: KAZAKHSTAN AND TURKMENISTAN IN PERSPECTIVE

Umar Khan*

Abstract

Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are struggling from lack of trade diversification and post COVID-19 economic woes. These issues can be addressed via regional cooperation and expansion into each other's markets. Pakistan's new geo-economics ambition and efforts to reach out to Central Asian Republics (CARs) is gaining momentum, with Gwadar port being touted as the go to port for CARs. Pakistan has a lot to offer these countries in terms of being a reliable source of imports, as well as being the closest outlet for their ocean trade. Presently, issue of access via unstable Afghanistan remains a major challenge, which has been a regular point of academic discussion. However, there hasn't been much discourse on the challenges and opportunities that await Pakistan, once stability in Afghanistan is regained and physical access issues between CARs and Pakistan are resolved. This work employs limited quantitative analysis to examine trade potential and proposes practical solutions to barriers to trade that must be addressed if these countries wish to be more than pawns in the New Great Game.

Keywords: Barriers to trade, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Oligopsony, Warehouse, New Great Game

CARs are energy rich nations, limited in their potential for trade due to their landlocked geography. The Caspian Sea allows for trade between these countries themselves, but it does not provide them much needed access to the world's ocean waterways and, by extension, global markets.

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CARs and the subcontinent have historically been connected with each other through the ancient silk route. However, this connectivity met a setback when CARs and the subcontinent were colonized by the Russians and the British respectively. The 'Great Game' that followed further insulated this connection with creation of a buffer zone in Afghanistan,[1] insulating British and Russian empires spheres of influence. Today, decades after the demise of both the Russian and British empires, a new competition, dubbed 'the New Great Game',[2] is brewing, over control of CARs hydrocarbon and mineral resources, as well as their transportation infrastructures.

Among CARs, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are geographically the largest countries, with the highest purchasing power and GDP per capita.[3] Moreover, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan constitute the northern most and the southern most CARs, respectively. CARs have a total population of about 72 million people, with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan contributing 18 million and 6 million people, respectively.[4]While neither of these countries (or the CARs as a whole) have a large enough population to replace Pakistan's traditional export markets of the US and EU: their central location, relative financial stability, and good infrastructure make them a potential jump off base from which goods can be re-exported to other countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, and Eastern Europe. It also merits noticing that Pakistan's exports to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan combined for the year 2018 amounted to $87.7 million.[5] Compared to this miniscule figure, Pakistan's exports of goods and services to a war-torn of Afghanistan amounted to $1.3 billion,[6]i.e. fourteen times greater than the two relatively rich countries, indicating huge trade potential.

Because of the CARs landlocked status, China, Iran, and Russia have become Kazakhstan's and Turkmenistan's primary trade partners, resulting in a lack of trade diversification. This lack of trade diversification makes these countries vulnerable tool igopsony for their hydrocarbon wealth. Challenges faced by Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan due limited number of trading partners are described in ensuing paragraphs.

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[1] Adam Saud, "Revivalism of silk routes: CPEC and south Asia-central Asia connectivity."*Journal of Political Studies, (Special Issue)*(2018): 191-205.

[2] Ramakrushna Pradhan, "Energy Geopolitics and the New Great Game in Central Asia." Millennial Asia, (May 2021). https://doi.org/10.1177/09763996211003260.

[3] "GDP per Capita (current US$) - Europe & Central Asia." World Bank Data. Accessed February 22, 2021. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?end=2019 &locations=Z7&start=1960 &view=chart.

[4] "Population, Total - Europe & Central Asia." World Bank Data. Accessed February 22, 2021.https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?end=2019&locations=Z7& start=1960&view=chart.

[5] "Pakistan Trade Summary 2018 | WITS Data," accessed September 30, 2020, https:// wits.worldbank.org/ CountryProfile/en/Country/PAK/Year/2018/Summary.

[6] Ibid.

Turkmenistan& Kazakhstan's Challenges

Turkmenistan has the world's fourth largest[7] natural gas reserves. However, neighbouring countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran also have adequate gas reserves making it hard to sell its gas to its immediate neighbours. Moreover, its neighbours benefit from better geographical positioning for hydrocarbon exports than Turkmenistan and are working on their own pipeline networks for exporting gas rather than facilitate Ashgabat for the trans-shipment of Turkmen gas to the same markets.[8] Russia used to be Turkmenistan's primary export market for gas, but with Russia having surplus gas of its own, Turkmenistan's gas was routed through Russian pipelines to former Soviet bloc republics that often defaulted on payments,[9] necessitating the search for new markets.

Recent disputes[10] over gas pricing with Russia and Iran have further prompted Turkmenistan to seek diversification of its export markets. Turkmenistan's reliance on Russian pipelines has ended with the commissioning of Central Asia-China pipelines,[11] which has made China its main customer, importing 30-35 BCM[12] of natural gas per year. However, Turkmenistan's farther location makes its gas more expensive than Uzbek and Kazakhstan's gas exports to China. Moreover, in comparison to LNG, same large distances have made cost of moving Central Asian gas to China's eastern load centres uncompetitive.[13]

Aside from China, one other potential eastern market for Turkmen gas remains untapped: Pakistan and, by extension, India. This is the primary motivator for Turkmenistan to seek trade ties[14] with Pakistan in the form of the Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India pipeline. This presents Pakistan with an opportunity to influence Turkmen trade policies in its favour, owing to the ubiquitous desire for equitable balance of trade and favourable balance of payment.

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[7] Asian Development Bank. "*ADB Approves First Full Country Partnership Strategy for Turkmenistan*." (Asian Development Bank. February 13, 2018). Accessed August 06, 202. https://www.adb.org/news/adb-approves-first-full-country-partnership-strategy-turkmenistan.

[8] Paul Stronski, *"Turkmenistan at twenty-five: The high price of authoritarianism.*" (Carniege Endowment for International Peace, 2017).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Bruce Pannier, "Analysis: Iran Offers Turkmenistan New Gas-Swap Deal to Pakistan." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. April 30, 2018). Accessed July 31, 2021. https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-offers-turkmenistan-new-gas-swap-deal-to-pakistan-tapi/29201086.html.

[11] *Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline*. Accessed February 11, 2021.https://www.cnpc.com.cn /en/CentralAsia/CentralAsia_index.shtml.

[12] Simon Pirani, "*Central Asian Gas: prospects for the 2020s."* (2019).

[13] Ibid.

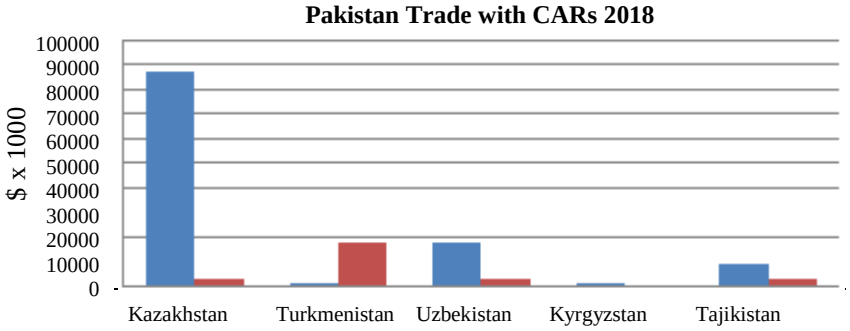
[14] Oxford Analytica. "Low gas prices drive Turkmenistan to seek volume sales."*Emerald Expert Briefings* oxan-db (2016).

Kazakhstan, like Turkmenistan, relies on the goodwill of its neighbours to trade with the rest of the world. Its hydrocarbon exports to rest of the world through Russian territory via Caspian Pipeline Consortium is an example of this handicap.[15]Similar to Turkmenistan, its oil and gas pipelines to the east have one big customer in China. Energy pipelines to Pakistan and its ports offer an appealing alternative to Kazakhstan to not only reach energy hungry markets of the south Asia but to diversify its trade partners, eliminating oligopsony.

Trade with Turkmenistan & Kazakhstan

Pakistan stands to benefit significantly from trade with CARs. Contrary to common assumption, while Pakistan's industrial and agricultural output may not be at par with countries such as China and Russia, it does offer an alternative in agricultural and light industrial commodities with competitive quality and price.

Presently, Pakistan conducts less than 1% of its total trade[16] with CARs. The following graph shows trade statistics of CARs with Pakistan.[17] With a volume of US $ 86.9 million, Kazakhstan is Pakistan's largest[18] export partner, and Turkmenistan is its largest import partner, with a volume of US $ 17.996 million.



Graph 1.Pakistan Trade with CARs 2018.
Source : https://wits.worldbank.org/

[15] BTI, *Kazakhstan Country Report*. (BTI, 2020). Accessed January 25, 2021. https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-KAZ-2020.html#pos17.

[16] World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS).World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) | Data on Export, Import, Tariff, NTM. Accessed February 22, 2021. https://wits.worldbank.org/.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "Trade with Central Asia: Minister for Better Linkages to Increase Trade." *The Express Tribune*. (March 23, 2018). Accessed March 02, 2021. https://tribune.com.pk/story/1667901/2-trade-central-asia-minister-better-linkages-increase-trade#:~:text=Pakistan's largest trading partner in with the Central Asian countries.

Regional Partnerships

Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are in many regional partnerships and bilateral/ multilateral treaties, which aim to increase trade volumes between countries. One of the most prominent regional cooperation programmes is Economic Coordination Organization (ECO), founded by Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. However, efficacy of this organization has been lacklustre despite many bilateral and multilateral agreements to enhance trade and connectivity among members. One of the major reasons[19] is US sanctions on its key member, Iran. Other influential and active international conventions or programmes which aim to improve trade with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are:

a. Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). It is an Asian Development Bank (ADB) sponsored initiative which was established in 2001.[20] It sponsors hard and soft infrastructure[21] development projects like roads/ railway links, improving logistics quality[22] and removing trade barriers to establish connectivity with CARs and the rest of the world. It is an analogue to Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, but with CARs in focus. CAREC has earmarked six routes, called transport corridors, to connect CARs with rest of the world. Two of these routes[23] (routes 5 and 6) originate/ terminate at Pakistani ports linking CARs with the Indian Ocean.

b. TIR. Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR)[24] or International Road Transports, is an international road transit convention that was concluded in 1975[25] to harmonize issues of international transport of goods. This convention not only covers

[19] Abdur Rehman, and Muhammad Mushtaq. "US Sanctions on Iran: Implications for the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)." *ASIAN Journal of International Peace & Security (AJIPS)* 4, no. 1 (2020): 96-108.

[20] "CAREC Program."CAREC Program. March 12, 2021. Accessed March 12, 2021. ht tps://www.carecprogram.org/.

[21] Michael J. Ferrantino," 11 Policies to improve the supply chain: what needs to be done?."*Global value chains in a changing world*(2013): 263.

[22] Cordula Rastogi, and Jean-François Arvis. *The Eurasian connection: supply-chain efficiency along the modern silk route through Central Asia*. (The World Bank, 2014).

23 "CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring Annual Report 2019" CAREC Program. June 1, 2020. Accessed February 07, 2021. https://www.Carecprogram .org/?publication=carec- corridor-performance-measurement-monitoring- 2019.

[24] "*TIR Introduction*. "UNECE. Accessed February 11, 2021. https://unece.org/ transporttir/introduction.

[25] "UN, United Nations, UN Treaties, Treaties." (United Nations). Accessed February 11, 2021. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XI-A-16 &chapter= 11&clang=_en.

customs transit by road but also by rail or a combination of rail and road. It is the only universal customs transit system in existence, allowing cargo to be moved in sealed containers/vehicles from one country's customs office of departure to another without requiring customs inspections through intermediate country borders, while ensuring cargo security and guarantees to customs authorities.

Analysing Trade Opportunities

In Post COVID-19 world economic recession, Pakistan faces bleak prospects amplified by lack of diversification of export markets; with her major export partners being US and EU. This lack of trade diversification renders Pakistan at the mercy of politics/ policies of these entities affecting its geopolitical interests.[26] In terms of imports, Pakistan's highest import bill is for petroleum from the Arabian Peninsula. Pakistan's dwindling indigenous gas resources are expected to fall to about 1 BCFPD (Billion Cubic Feet Per Day) by 2025[27] and at the same time, gas demand in Pakistan is expected to rise to about 8 BCFPD, creating a demand gap of 7 BCFPD which will be fulfilled through imported gas and LNG. With linking up of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan through gas (and oil) pipelines, Pakistan has the opportunity to create a buyer's market for petroleum and get the best deal on fuel prices by pitting OPEC countries and non-OPEC countries (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) against each other. Furthermore, since the Persian Gulf is a potential conflict zone between Iran and GCC states, this can provide Pakistan with energy security, ensuring investor confidence in Pakistani industry to deliver even when regional issues impede global trade. In turn, Pakistan has significant expertise in banking, pharmaceutical, irrigation, livestock, poultry, agricultural machinery, and light industrial goods sectors,[28] which it could[29] trade[30] with CARs in exchange for aforementioned hydrocarbon resources.

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[26] Hafner-Burton, Emilie M. "Trading Human Rights: How Preferential Trade Agreements Influence Government Repression."*International Organization* 59, no. 3 (2005): 593-629. Accessed February 6, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877810.

[27] Anzar Mahmood, Nadeem Javaid, Adnan Zafar, Raja Ali Riaz, Saeed Ahmed, and Sohail Razzaq."Pakistan's overall energy potential assessment, comparison of LNG, TAPI and IPI gas projects." *Renewable and sustainable energy reviews* 31 (2014): 182-193.

[28] Mubeen, Adnan, and Bushra Fatima."Strategic and economic interests of Pakistan and India in Central Asia."*South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2020).

[29] "Pakistan and Turkmenistan Agree to Boost Trade Relations." *Daily Times*. Last modified May 7, 2021. Accessed December 16, 2022. https://dailytimes.com.pk/ 753405/ pakistan- and-turkmenistan-agree-to-boost-trade-relations-2/.

[30] Pakistan interested in oil and gas cooperation with Kazakhstan. (22AD, November 9). *Official Information Source of Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. Retrieved December 13, 2022, from https://primeminister.kz/en/news/pakistan-interested-in-oil-and-gas-cooperation-with-kazakhstan-17105028.

Demand for Pakistani Goods in Kazakhstan

Analysis of trade data[31] reveals that there is untapped export potential of more than $3.5B for Pakistani goods in Kazakhstan. The table below compares the total value of top eleven commodities exported (A) to Kazakhstan to the total value of same commodities imported by Kazakhstan via other international markets (B). The export potential column (B-A) indicates how much more of that item can be reliably exported from Pakistan on provision of incentives and removal of trade barriers. The highest export potential for Pakistan includes pharmaceutical products, optical/ surgical appliances, textiles and apparels.

Pakistan Export Potential to Kazakhstan						
S.#	**HS Code**	**Product Label[32]**	**Pakistan export to Kazakhstan 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Kazakhstan import from world 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Pakistan Export to world 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Export Potential (US Dollar thousand)**
			A[33]	**B[34]**	**C[35]**	**B - A**
1.	07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	2,332	167,679	250,245	165,347
2.	08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	8,694	416,856	398,771	408,162
3.	09	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	375	130,119	115,333	129,744
4.	10	Cereals	61,561	78,641	2,375,641	17,080
5.	11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	149	29,735	150,723	29,586

[31] ITC, International Trade Centre. "Trade Statistics for International Business Development". Trade Map - Bilateral Trade between Pakistan and Kazakhstan in 2019. Accessed February 21, 2021. https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral.aspx?nvpm=1|586||398||TOTAL|||2|1|1|1|1||1|1|1|1.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

6.	12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal	6,342	86,660	92,407	80,318
7.	30	Pharmaceutical products	2,835	1,156,897	217,587	1,154,062
8.	42	Articles of leather; saddlery and harness; travel goods, handbags and similar containers; articles	200	76,304	634,279	76,104
9.	62	Articles of apparel and clothing accessories, not knitted or crocheted	218	352,517	2,814,503	352,299
10.	63	Other made-up textile articles; sets; worn clothing and worn textile articles; rags	136	162,681	4,070,644	162,545
11.	90	Optical, photographic, precision, medical or surgical	218	891,249	454,177	891,031
Export Potential						**$3.5B**

Table 1. Export potential to Kazakhstan

Demand for Pakistani Goods in Turkmenistan

Similarly, following table shows analysis of trade data[36] of top exports to Turkmenistan, which reveals more than $286M of unrealized export potential of Pakistan to Turkmenistan (B-A). The highest export potential for Pakistan includes textile, pharmaceutical products, items of iron/ steel and sugar confectionery.

[36] ITC, International Trade Centre."Trade Statistics for International Business Development." Trade Map - Bilateral Trade between Pakistan and Turkmenistan. Accessed February 21, 2021. https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm=1|586||795||TOTAL|||2|1|1|2|2|1|1|1|1|1.

Pakistan Export Potential to Turkmenistan						
S.#	**HS Code**	**Product Label** [37]	**Pakistan export to Turkmenistan 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Turkmenistan import from world 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Pakistan Export to world 2019 (US Dollar thousand)**	**Export Potential (US Dollar thousand)**
			A[38]	**B**[39]	**C**[40]	**B - A**
1.	53	Other vegetable textile fibers; paper yarn and woven fabrics of paper yarn	1,176	1,664	5,048	488
2.	36	Explosives; pyrotechnic products; matches; pyrophoric alloys; certain combustible preparation	437	3,762	8,927	3,325
3.	63	Other made-up textile articles; sets; worn clothing and worn textile articles; rags	386	4,299	4,070,644	3,913
4.	30	Pharmaceutical products	324	111,301	217,587	110,977
5.	08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	102	23,233	398,771	23,131
6.	72	Iron and steel	80	92,013	63,335	91,933
7.	17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	48	39,935	343,688	39,887
8.	07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	48	6,483	250,245	6,435
Export Potential						**$286M**

Table 2: Export potential to Turkmenistan

Regional Competitors

Pakistan's geo-economic designs are curtailed by lack of direct borders with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Pakistan can only access these countries via Afghanistan, Iran and China. Traditionally, Afghanistan has been the main transit route to CARs for Pakistan. Iran and China can also be used to circumnavigate Afghanistan. Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA 2010)[41] and Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement

[37] Ibid
[38] Ibid
[39] Ibid
[40] Ibid
[41] "*Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement*." (Digital image. Ministry of Commerce Pakistan). Accessed January 25, 2021. https://www.commerce.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/pdf/APTTA.pdf.

(QTTA)[42] are the main instruments through which Pakistani goods reach CARs via Afghanistan and China respectively. Unlike China and Iran, Afghanistan does not have a robust industry and hence, at present, cannot act as a trade competitor to transiting Pakistani goods. Whereas transit trade through China and Iran does pose that risk.

Iran has traditionally been a go-to port for the CARs. With its excellent rail infrastructure and contiguous connectivity, it offers CARs access to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean via Bandar Abbas and now Chahbahar. Iran views itself as the hub of trade for all CARs and its endeavours in-terms of International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)[43] and Chahbahar port agreement[44] reflect that ambition. Moreover, ECO headquartered in Tehran, places Iran in a perfect central position to further its geo-economic ambitions by influencing all commerce, traversing east to west and north to south, to pass through Iran. Economic sanctions against Iran are the only thing standing in Iran's way to dominate trade with CARs, due to its superior rail infrastructure and contiguous borders with Turkmenistan. Pakistan can access Turkmenistan and other CARs via Iran, but this would only help Iran compete more effectively with Pakistani goods and would likely result in shrinking trading space for Pakistani exports. The perception of Iran's ambitions as being complementary[45] to Pakistan's is misleading. Iran has a precedence of trade rivalry[46] with a country to whom it provided a land bridge to CARs. Iran had repeatedly raised costs for Turkish cargos transiting Iran to CARs by increasing transit trade fees[47] and refusing to refuel CARs bound Turkish trucks[48] in order to make Turkish

[42] Muhammad Shoaib, "Presentation on Quadrilateral Agreement" CAREC Program. 2015. Accessed February 07, 2021. https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/2015-QTTA-06-PAK-Presentation-QATT-Workshop.pdf.

[43] Evgeny Vinokurov, Arman Ahunbaev, Nursultan Usmanov, and Alexander Zaboev. "International North–South Transport Corridor: Investments and Soft Infrastructure." Eurasian Development Bank, October 26, 2022. Last modified October 26, 2022. Accessed December 18, 2022. https://eabr.org/analytics/special-reports/.

[44] Shawn Amirthan, "What are India, Iran, and Afghanistan's Benefits from the Chabahar Port Agreement?." *Strategic Analysis* 41, no. 1 (2017): 87-93.

[45] "Gwadar, Pakistan's Vital Trade Route with Iran and Importance of Security in Balochistan." IRNA English. July 06, 2021. Accessed August 08, 2021. https://en.irna.ir/news/84395002/Gwadar-Pakistan-s-vital-trade-route-with-Iran-and-importance.

[46] Omid Rahimi and Ali Heydari for The Diplomat. "How Iran and Turkey Compete in Central Asian Trade." – The Diplomat. February 26, 2020. Accessed August 08, 2021. https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/how-iran-and-turkey-complete-in-central-asian-trade/.

[47] "Turkey and Iran Agree on Transit Truck Fee." *World Bulletin / News, Turkey and Islamic World* (November 17, 2014). Accessed August 09, 2021. https://worldbulletin.dunyabulteni.net/turkey/turkey-and-iran-agree-on-transit-truck-fee-h148602.html.

[48] Turkey Hopes to Normalize Truck Transit Fees with Iran." *World Bulletin / News from Turkey and Islamic World*. (November 11, 2014). Accessed February 07, 2021.

exports uncompetitive to Iranian exports in the CARs market. This case should serve as a cautionary tale for any trade strategist.

As lack of stability and political will in Afghanistan made transportation of goods a liability: Pakistan along with China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, decided in the form of Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement (QTTA)[49] to bypass Afghanistan by transporting goods using Karakorum highway via China to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. QTTA[50] was signed on 9th March 1995 by Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and enabled Pakistan to circumnavigate Afghanistan to Central Asia. It was enforced in May 2004 and followed the route Karachi-Rawalpindi-Hassanabdal -Gilgit-Khunjrab (Pak/China Border) -Kashgar-Torugart (China/Kyrgyzstan Border) -Bishkek- Akjol-Kordai (Kyrgyzstan/ Kazakhstan Border) -Almaty (Kazakhstan). QTTA uses Karakorum highway to connect to Xinxiang province in China, which in turn is linked with CARs. However, this agreement has not been effective in enhancing trade as cargo trucks moving through this route face numerous delays at border crossing points (BCPs) due to oversight and lack of concentrated effort by the member countries. Since QTTA uses the Karakorum highway, CPEC projects will help Pakistan to connect with Kazakhstan using the CPEC infrastructure. Not only will hard infrastructure issues be resolved, but soft[51] barriers such as delays in BCPs and customs coordination are expected to be streamlined automatically, when China's own goods are subject to such transit exercises from Pakistan to China and vice versa. However, QTTA does not provide access to Turkmenistan.

It is significant to mention that both China and Iran have good industrial capacity and compete with Pakistani products in CARs market. Relying on Iranian or Chinese transit has the potential to introduce unintended sharing of trade intelligence and subsequently loss of market share from CARs in the long run. Afghanistan with no industrial capacity, offers no competition and is a viable transit country for Pakistan despite its internal instability/ political challenges, making it imperative for Pakistan to do what it can to achieve some semblance of stability in Afghanistan, if it desires to benefit from trade with CARs.

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https://worldbulletin.dunyabulteni.net/turkey/turkey-hopes-to-normalize-truck-transit-fees-with-iran-h148185.html.

[49] Muhammad Shoaib, "Presentation on Quadrilateral Agreement" CAREC Program. 2015. Accessed February 07, 2021. https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/2015-QTTA-06-PAK-Presentation-QATT-Workshop.pdf.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Michael J. Ferrantino, "11 Policies to improve the supply chain: what needs to be done?." *Global value chains in a changing world* (2013): 263.

Costs to Trade

Challenges to trade are gauged in terms of costs associated with it. Higher the costs, more prohibitive the trade. When compared to their coastal neighbours, landlocked countries usually have higher trade costs which are generally divided into three types:[52]

a. Natural Trade Costs. The location, culture, and/or history of the source country and trading partners all contribute to these costs. These factors are permanent and difficult to address in the short-to-medium term through policy. The natural trade costs include geographical factors[53] such as:

(1) Contiguity of land border.
(2) Access to the sea (or landlockedness).
(3) Geographical distance from trading partners (i.e., remoteness).
(4) Cultural and historical differences between trading nations. This includes using a common language (official or unofficial), having previously been the same country (e.g. USSR), and formerly being in a colonial relationship.

b. Non – Tariff Trade Costs. These are costs that can be lowered by policies because of their domestic reasons. They are:

(1) Direct behind and at-the-border trade costs.
(2) The availability and use of information communication technology (ICT) services.
(3) The business regulatory environment.
(4) Exchange rate fluctuations.
(5) Other non-tariff measures (NTMs) include sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures[54] (i.e., the implementation and compliance with WTO-mandated food safety, animal, and plant health measures) and technical barriers to trade (TBTs), such as technical regulations and voluntary standards.

c. Tariff Trade Costs. This includes tariffs on goods and services levied by a country.

[52] UN.UNESCAP. *Reducing Trade Costs In Asia-Pacific Developing Countries.* By Yann Duval, Amandeep Saggu, and Chorthip Utoktham. (2015). Accessed February 15, 2021. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/STI84_Final.pdf.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Requirements For Phytosanitary Certificates. Accessed February 10, 2021. http://www.fao.org/3/y3241e/y3241e06.htm.

Challenges

Modern era is the era of economic competition and cooperation with international alliances cemented on mutually beneficial trade. Pakistan is in a unique geostrategic position with direct access to Indian Ocean with her ports long envied by the landlocked states of Central Asia. Cargo handling capacities of Karachi and Bin Qasim ports are 25 and 17 million tons respectively, which are reaching their capacity.[55]With the establishment of Gwadar port, Pakistan's cargo handling capabilities have improved, which can be used to cater for CARs freight needs. However, due to lack of direct rail and road access (hard infrastructure), this facility is underutilised. Furthermore, there are soft infrastructure[56,57] connectivity issues as well, that have plagued commerce between Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Soft infrastructure issues of tariff and non-tariff trade costs are exacerbated by geopolitics, country policies, country's business environment, customs and border regulations. Details of factors contributing to prohibitive trade costs resulting in low trade volumes are described below:

a. Poor Rail Connectivity - Natural Trade Costs

Landlocked nature of CARs and large distances make a cheap commodity automatically expensive due high transportation costs. Onlycost effective solution is transportation via rail. However, there is no direct rail connectivity from Pakistan to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Even within Pakistan, roads carry 94 percent of inland cargo,[58] which is the most expensive form of transport after airplanes. Pakistan's rail infrastructure is poor, making it expensive[59] to transport goods through Pakistan via roads and unappealing to countries interested in using Pakistani ports. In contrast, Iran has invested heavily in rail infrastructure and is directly connected by rail to CARs via Turkmenistan offering a cheaper path to and from Indian Ocean.

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[55] Kausar Takrim, & Afeef, M. Prospects of Gwadar Port as a Hub Port. *Journal of Managerial Sciences*, *9*(1), (2015).

[56] "CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring Annual Report 2019" CAREC Program. (June 1, 2020). Accessed February 07, 2021. https://www.carecprogram.org/?publication=carec-corridor-performance-measurement-monitoring-2019.

[57] Michael J. Ferrantino, "11 Policies to improve the supply chain: what needs to be done?."*Global value chains in a changing world* (2013): 263.

[58] Ibid

[59] Rashid, Amjad, Ejaz Ghani, and Tariq Mahmood. "Export barriers in Pakistan: results of a firm-level survey." (2012): 103-134.

b. Customs and Border Control - Non Tariff Trade Costs

While Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan are members of ECO[60] and CAREC, passing goods through these countries is difficult because customs/border crossing points (BCPs) in these countries take an inordinate amount of time to process and clear goods. This cause cost escalation to businessmen due to delay and makes trade between these countries unattractive.

Asian Development Bank sponsored study[61] has adjudged that BCPs at Pak Afghan border (Torkham and Chaman) are one of the slowest and most expensive in the region. A positive step was the recent implementation[62] of 24/7 operations at Torkham, which reduced long waiting times at this high-traffic BCP. However, Pakistan still faces challenges to reduce costs and time for clearing cargo at BCPs. This delay is also attributed to unwarranted loading and unloading of cargo from Pakistani trucks to Afghan trucks at Pak Afghan border, as opposed to letting cargo pass on Pakistani trucks through Afghanistan as per APTTA.[63]

c. Inefficient Ports- Non Tariff Trade Costs

Pakistani ports have the longest dwell periods in the region.[64,65] Cargo delays at ports result in accumulated demurrage charges (penalties for failing to unload cargo within the allotted time), as well as higher land transportation costs. Moreover, security deposit, detention, demurrage and other associated port charges are significantly greater than Iran's Bandar Abbas port,[66]

[60] Organization, Economic Cooperation. About ECO. Accessed February 11, 2021. http:// www.eco. int/general_content/86055-History.html?t=General-content.

[61] "CAREC Corridor Performance Measurement and Monitoring Annual Report 2019. "CAREC Program. June 1, 2020. Accessed February 07, 2021. https://www. Carecprog ram.org/?publication=carec-corridor-performance-measurement-monitoring-2019.

[62] Al Jazeera. "Pakistan, Afghanistan Inaugurate 24/7 Torkham Border Crossing." Conflict News | Al Jazeera. September 18, 2019. Accessed August 01, 2021. https://ww w.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/18/pakistan-afghanistan-inaugurate-24-7-torkham-border.

[63] PAJCCI. "Pakistan- Afghanistan Bilateral and Transit Trade Issues & Proposed Resolutions." April 2018. Accessed February 08, 2021. http://www.pajcci.com/ Downlo ads/Pakistan%20Afghanistan%20Bilateral%20and%20Transit%20Trade%20Issues%20& %20Proposed%20Resolutions%20-%20April%202018.pdf.

[64] Arif Rafiq. "Regional Transit Trade Isn't Enough to Drive Pakistan's Gwadar Port." Middle East Institute. October 14, 2020. Accessed February 08, 2021. https://www.mei.edu/publications/regional-transit-trade-isnt-enough-drive-pakistans-gwadar-port.

[65] *Sector Assessment.* Publication no .PAK 46378.Accessed January 1, 2021. https://www .adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/46378-002-ssa.pdf.

[66] PAJCCI. "Pakistan- Afghanistan Bilateral and Transit Trade Issues & Proposed Resolutions." April 2018. Accessed February 08, 2021. http://www.pajcci.com/

resulting in loss of business to Iran. For instance, security deposit for a 20 Ft container at Karachi costs[67] 20 times more than in Bandar Abbas (Iran).

d. Lack of Standard Business Culture -Non Tariff Trade Costs

There is a general reluctance[68] on part of businessmen on opening Letters of Credit[69] (L/C) for doing business in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan due strict Kazakh and Turkmen governments foreign exchange controls, cumbersome banking procedures[70,71] and currency conversion[72] issues there. L/C ensures that business parties keep their end of the bargain and that payments are made on time, with no risk of the payee reneging at the time of payment. Generally, businesses in these countries import goods, sell them, and then reimburse the exporting party. This non-standard business practice is a big risk to exporters and discourages serious Pakistani businesses who wish to do business there. Furthermore, due to lack of banking activity and financial viability, Pakistani banks[73] have started leaving CARs.

e. Removing Tariff Trade Costs

The best way[74] to reduce tariff trade costs is to enter into Preferential Trade Agreements or Free Trade Agreements (PTA/ FTA) with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Though, proposal of FTA with Kazakhstan (part of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU))

Downloads/Pakistan%20Afghanistan%20Bilateral%20and%20Transit%20Trade%20Issues%20&%20 Proposed%20Resolutions%20-%20April%202018.pdf.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Muhammad Farooque, TIC Kazakhstan. Email interview with author. March 24, 2021.

[69] Julia Kagan, "What You Should Know About Letters of Credit." Investopedia. August 28, 2020. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/letterofcredit.asp.

[70] The International Trade Administration (ITA), U.S. Department of Commerce. Accessed August 09, 2021. https://legacy.export.gov/article?id=Kazakhstan-methods-of-payment.

[71] The International Trade Administration (ITA), U.S. Department of Commerce. "Turkmenistan - Banking Systems Turkmenistan - Banking Systems." Export.gov. Accessed August 09, 2021. https://legacy.export.gov/article?id=Turkmenistan-Banking-Systems.

[72] Courtney Brasier, "Turkmenistan - United States Department of State." (US Department of State July 19, 2021). Accessed August 09, 2021. https://www.state.gov/reports/ 2020-investment-climate-statements/turkmenistan/.

[73] "Ashgabat Branch of NBP in Voluntary Liquidation."*News Central Asia*. (November 25, 2020). Accessed February 11, 2021. http://www.newscentralasia.net/2020/11/25/ashgabat-branch-of-nbp-in-voluntary-liquidation-pakistan-remains-committed-to-tapi-corridor/.

[74] Farooque, Muhammad, TIC Kazakhstan. Email interview with author. March 24,2021.

is under consideration but many of Pakistan's competitors like India are at an advance stage[75] of negotiations with the EAEU. Iran, Singapore, China, and other countries have already signed[76] these agreements with Kazakhstan (EAEU) and are enjoying zero or negligible tariffs on their products. An obstacle to successful negotiating with EAEU was Pakistan's lack of diplomatic[77] relations with Armenia. With the end of recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict,[78] Pakistan may reconsider its approach with Armenia in light of developing circumstances and peace initiatives.

Turkmenistan is not a member of EAEU due to its neutrality[79] stance and refuses to join any bloc. Any future TAPI negotiations[80] offer an opportunity to Pakistan to incentivize Turkmenistan to sign a PTA/ FTA with it.

WAY FORWARD

Waiting until infrastructure is built for accessing CARs or political and administrative issues (soft barriers) are resolved is not prudent; otherwise Pakistan would enable other competitors to carve out a market share. India, like Pakistan, wants to access CARs. Because of national security concerns, Pakistan acts as a roadblock to Indian ambitions. India has attempted to circumnavigate Pakistan with investing in Iranian Chahbahar port. India is not waiting idly till development of long term connectivity projects, but proactively has managed to have direct flights, with air freights to CARs. In this way, India is promoting her industry and image as a reliable provider of perishable commodities using any means necessary to have a presence in the market. Moreover, India also has an edge in that it has a favourable perception in CARs due to its historical ties with USSR, of which Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan used to be a part. Whereas, Pakistan suffers from a major branding issue and has a history of animosity towards USSR vis-à-vis Afghan jihad; complicating trade relationships. In a nutshell, to increase trade, Pakistan must be introduced, marketed, and actively

[75] ARIC, Asian Development Bank."By Country/Economy - Free Trade Agreements." Accessed January 20, 2021. https://aric.adb.org/fta-country.
[76] Ibid
[77] Muhammad Fahim, "Pakistan and the Question of Recognizing Armenia: Pakistan-Armenia Relations, the Issue of Kashmir & Nagorno-Karabakh."*Journal of South Asian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2020): 39-45.
[78] Simon Ostrovsky Grantee. "How Azerbaijan Won the Karabakh War." Pulitzer Center. January 06, 2021. Accessed August 08, 2021. https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/ how-azerbaijan-won-karabakh-war.
[79] Sullivan, Charles J. "Neutrality In Perpetuity: Foreign Policy Continuity In Turkmenistan." *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 4 (2020): 779-794.
[80] "Turkmenistan Assures Pakistan to Address Gas Price Concerns." *The News*. (September 19, 2020). Accessed August 08, 2021. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/ 716800-turkmenistan-assures-pakistan-to-address-gas-price-concerns.

promoted as a viable trade partner and a desirable business destination through coordinated inter-ministerial bold initiatives. The following are low-hanging fruits that, if pursued, offer promising dividends of increased trade volumes with CARs:

a. Visa Restrictions for Pakistanis

Visa issue remains a major bottleneck for trade. At the dawn of post Soviet era, CARs had relaxed visa policies w.r.t. Pakistan. However, with the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and the events of 9/11, Pakistan's global image suffered as a perceived hub of instability along with Afghanistan. Turmoil in Afghan Pakistan border areas after 9/11 further helped to portray Pakistan as a sanctuary for many proscribed extremist outfits like Hizbul Tahrir,[81] which were thought to be inspiring instability in nascent Central Asian Republics. These countries took steps to counter such threats[82] which included travel restrictions. Consequently, visa regime for Pakistanis was made restrictive, which interrupted travel of traders between these countries.

However, times are changing and Pakistan has launched initiative of e-visa facility for Kazakh nationals,[83] however, the same has not been reciprocated by Kazakhstan and Letter of Invitation (LOI) is required for a visa. Kazakh visa fees are also on the higher side.[84] In contrast, Kazakhstan has extended e-visa[85] facility to India. Taking advantage of this, Indian business presence has blossomed in Kazakhstan.

Comparatively, Turkmenistan Government is isolationist[86] and has strict visa entry requirements for anyone who wishes to visit the country. Businessmen and entrepreneurs have a tough time getting there and work. Turkmenistan does not have an e-visa

[81] Zeyno Baran, "Hizbut-Tahrir." *Islam'sp* (2004): 1-139.

[82] *Interfax.* Accessed February 10, 2021. http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div= 2412.

[83] "Countries Eligible for Pakistan Online Visa."Pakistan Online Visa System. April 29, 2019. Accessed February 11, 2021. https://visa.nadra.gov.pk/electronic-travel-authorization-eta/.

[84] "Kazakhstan Visa Guide."Caravanistan. January 17, 2021. Accessed February 22, 2021. https://caravanistan.com/visa/kazakhstan.

[85]Govt of Kazakstan Visa, Accessed February 11, 2021.https://egov.kz/cms/en/ articles/rk_visa_ obtaining.

[86] Paul Stronski, "Turkmenistan at twenty-five: The high price of authoritarianism." *Carniege Endowment for International Peace* (2017).

facility; however, Pakistan has extended the same[87] to Turkmenistan.

Another bottleneck to trade traffic is the availability and the cost of transport permits, which are required from transporters.[88] In addition to obtaining a transport permit, foreign transport operators must pay different taxes and charges, such as road tax and excess axle load charges, to enter (and pass through) the territory of CARs. Foreign truck drivers/ operators must also obtain a visa in advance at the CAR's embassies for entry. Such long bureaucratic procedures typically result in costly delays (escalating costs), which deters traders.

Visa regimes in CARs are strict but can be navigated with adroit diplomacy. With the conclusion of the global war on terror (GWOT) and a shifting global environment, Pakistan's soft and benign image may be actively promoted, with the primary goal of Pakistan's embassies in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan being the elimination of visa complications and the facilitation of bilateral trade.

b. Direct Air Link

Good connectivity facilitates economic development. Freight can be transported by road from Pakistan to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in four and fifteen[89] days, respectively. This makes transporting perishable commodities to CARs unfeasible.

Pakistan used to have direct flights[90] to CARs in the 1990s, but low volumes and visa restrictions led to cessation of all direct air links with CARs in 2014. In order to address low volumes, PIA had previously asked CARs to give it Fifth Freedom Rights,[91]i.e. collecting passengers from their countries en-route to European destinations which will allow the airline to keep the route financially viable simultaneously keeping the direct air link alive,

[87] "Countries Eligible for Pakistan Online Visa."Pakistan Online Visa System. April 29, 2019. Accessed February 11, 2021. https://visa.nadra.gov.pk/electronic-travel-authorization-eta/.

[88] "Central Asia: Increasing Gains from Trade Through Regional Cooperation in Trade Policy, Transport, and Customs Transit." Asian Development Bank. 2006. Accessed February 08, 2021. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/ publication/29927/central-asia-trade-policy.pdf.

[89] Muhammad Farooque, TIC Kazakhstan. Email interview with author. March 24, 2021.

[90] Zulqernain Tahir, "Direct Air Link to Central Asia Snapped." *DAWN.COM*. (March 02, 2014). Accessed February 10, 2021. https://www.dawn.com/news/1090528.

[91] "Freedoms of the Air."Freedoms of the Air. Accessed February 11, 2021. https://www.icao.int/pages/freedomsair.aspx.

but this request was denied. Protecting[92] local airlines from competition in any shape or form (e.g Fifth freedom rights) is only natural. A win-win solution for small to medium size airlines of Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan can always be carved out using regional cooperation platforms especially CAREC.[93] Kazakhstan's[94] recent shift towards open sky policy is a development worth exploring via bilateral treaties.

Conversely, as already discussed, India enjoys good image and trade relations with CARs because of its history with former USSR. Presently, flights between India and Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are continuing,[95] promoting tourism as well as transporting Indian perishables and medical goods into their countries. Air cargo is the most expensive form of transport, but without direct land connections to these economies, Indian companies are creating a toehold and advertising their presence; thus carving a market share. The importance of market presence currently is more important than large profit margins, until viable rail/ road links to the CARs have been created.

c. Establishment of Pakistan Display / Warehouse Facilities

As mentioned earlier, CARs have unconventional business environment w.r.t L/Cs. This unconventional business practice incurs huge risk which is not feasible to be undertaken by a lone businessman. This necessitates government mandated support.

To tap into Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's unconventional markets, Pakistani Government (GoP) can establish[96] display centres and warehouses in these countries under the auspices of Trade and Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) to encourage local CARs businesses to buy Pakistani goods directly from these facilities. These display centres and warehouses shall function to alleviate risks to Pakistani exporters by setting up a government mandated trade outpost.

Due to unstable and volatile exchange rates for Turkmenistan's Manat and Kazakhstani Tenge, barter system of

[92] "Open Sky Policy: A Financial Disaster for Pakistan." *Global Village Space*, (February 8, 2020). https://www.globalvillagespace.com/open-sky-policy-a-financial-disaster-for-pakistan/.

[93] "Aviation and the Role of CAREC A Scoping Study September 2018". CAREC Program. June 1, 2020. Accessed January 07, 2022.https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/2018-aviation-role-carec-study.pdf.

[94] David Casey, "Kazakhstan Adopts Open Skies at 11 Airports." *Routes*. (Routes, November 6, 2019). https://www.routesonline.com/news/29/breaking-news/287381/kazakhstan-adopts-open-skies-at-11-airports/.

[95] Muhammad Farooque, TIC Kazakhstan. Email interview with author. March 24, 2021.

[96] Ibid.

trade at these trade facilities, along the lines of Pakistan-Iran barter trade mechanism,[97] is also an option worth exercising to ease process of doing business. These proposed facilities have the potential to become a hub of economic activities between Pakistan and CARs which may not only cater the needs of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan but all CARs and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

d. Requirement of Trade Rep

At present, TDAP representative (Trade and Investment Counsellor) is only stationed in Kazakhstan, and if Pakistan wants to tap into Turkmen markets, physical presence of a TDAP representative is necessary for assessing local business/ market environment and providing solutions to trade bottlenecks.

e. Registration of Pakistani Trading Companies in Central Asia

India and China encourage their companies to operate from Kazakhstan to increase their trade volume. Tengri Bank, Almaty has opened[98] more than 80 accounts of Indian companies during recent years. This trade facilitation increases market presence and incentivizes local businessman to trade in remote markets like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with their governments help, without which trade in such places is currently not possible. Government incentivization in-terms of tax breaks to trading houses/ companies operating in CARs will go a long way in diversifying export markets.

f. Break of Gauge

When railway lines of different widths from two regions meet, there is said to be a break in gauge. Pakistan, Iran, and CARs use Broad gauge, Standard gauge, and Russian gauge railway lines, respectively. Break of gauge is a significant cost component of rail freight shipping because it increases the cost and time of arrival of freight due to cargo needing to be shifted from one train to another, having the required rail gauge. During the Great Game, break of gauge due to its obstructive nature, defined borders of spheres of

[97] "Procedure for Operationalization of Barter Trade between Quetta Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Pakistan and Zahidan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Iran." *Ministry of Commerce | Government of Pakistan*. Last modified April 7, 2022. Accessed December 18, 2022. https://www.commerce.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Notification-for-Operationalization-of-Barter-Trade-with-Iran.pdf.

[98] Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "India Seeks to Enhance Investments in Kazakhstan through a Mega Investment Forum." *The Economic Time*. (November 08, 2018). Accessed January 22, 2021.https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/ policy/india-seeks-to-enhance-investments-in-kazakhstan-through-a-mega-investment-forum/articleshow/66544007.cms.

influence between Russia and Britain. To maintain perception of neutrality during the Great Game, Afghanistan opted out of any type of rail construction to dissuade any logistical advantage to any player.

Till now Afghanistan has not standardized a rail gauge. Any rail gauge selected by Afghanistan that is native to a neighbouring country will provide that neighbouring country with a cost and speed advantage when shipping freight. Russian gauge track in Afghanistan will streamline rail communication with all CARs. However, much like the old Great Game, it may provide logistical support to a more assertive Russia. Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine highlights the importance of railways in Russia's strategic calculus (as the Russian invasion force, mainly comprising of armoured vehicles, favoured railway lines to transport its vehicles to the invasion staging area). Standard gauge will give Iran, China, and Turkey an advantage in trade. Broad gauge would give Pakistan and, in the future, India an advantage in terms of seamless, low-cost transportation of their goods. As Afghanistan serves as a land bridge to CARs, it is in Pakistan's best interest that a Broad gauge rail line is chosen for any future trans-Afghan railway to outcompete regional economic competitors in freight costs to CARs.

g. Rationalizing TIR System

While TIR standardises freight transit across countries, fixed costs associated with TIR system are prohibitively expensive for most regional transporters.[99] This is because of stringent requirements of TIR system, namely:

(1) Requirement of use of good quality truck.
(2) Certification/ re-certification of transport/ truck every two years.
(3) Requirement of use of bonded carriers etc.

Another problem that increases the cost of using TIR is that the national association that regulates access to TIR system requires insurance which guarantees against liabilities of transporters. This association then recovers this cost through its operators in forms of fees, which causes cost escalation for transported freight. A regional approach to expensive TIR is need of the hour, which caters to

[99] "Central Asia: Increasing Gains from Trade through Regional Cooperation in Trade Policy, Transport, and Customs Transit." Asian Development Bank. 2006. Accessed February 08, 2021.

fiscal constraints of small Pakistani/regional carriers (owners of 2-4 trucks) by rationalising and lowering overall TIR fees/costs, allowing them to compete with more established players in the CARs market.

Conclusion

Post COVID-19 world economic recession amplifies the need for Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to diversify their trade and explore new partnerships for mutual prosperity. In present geo-economics scenario, particularly hydrocarbon oligopsony facing CARs, it is imperative for Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan to improve internal infrastructure, services and regulations through which Pakistani warm water ports can become viable for landlocked CARs. CAREC and TIR are important platforms which need to be utilized and tailored for enhancing connectivity. Pakistan, however, is not the only country that can provide CARs with access to warm water ports. With its ports near the mouth of the Indian Ocean, Iran is well positioned to capture CARs market by its low-cost rail and port connectivity. Economic sanctions against Iran give Pakistan time to address hard and soft infrastructure issues and gain access to the economies of CARs through adroit diplomacy and engaging in bilateral / multilateral economic and transit treaties. Further, it is not prudent to wait until these hard and soft infrastructure issues are resolved for accessing CARs; otherwise, Pakistan would allow other competitors to carve out a market share. Establishing a toehold in the nascent CARs market via air freight and TDAP sponsored barter trade facilities is currently more important than large profit margins, at least until effective rail/road and banking links to CARs are established. If these recommendations are prioritized and executed correctly, Pakistan is well poised not only to exploit markets of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan but also by extension, gain access to markets of other CARs, EAEU, and Eastern Europe.

DISCLAIMER

COVID-19 had hampered normal trade volumes world over and recent trade data for year 2020/21 does not reflect the actual trade potential between these countries. Therefore, suitable data sets have been taken to draw accurate conclusions.

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PAKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS: COOPERATION AND OPPORTUNITIES
TRADE AND ENERGY CORRIDORS: A RECIPE OF PROSPERITY FOR PAKISTAN AND CARs

Abai Zurdinov*

Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, natural resource-rich Central Asia, located in the heart of Asia, became an arena of struggle for sphere of influence between global and regional players, the competition between which continues and affects the security situation in Central Asia. The purpose of this report is to identify the main problems and prospects of cooperation between Pakistan and Central Asia, including in the context of the current dynamics of the situation in Afghanistan. The following methods were used in the research of this topic: systemic, historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary approaches. The report examines the Pakistani factor and its peculiarities in Central Asia. An attempt was made to assess the Pakistani factor in Central Asia, the drivers of its policy and its changing role in recent years. The advantages and disadvantages of Pakistan in building its policy toward the countries of the Central Asian region are analyzed. Particular attention is paid to energy and transport-logistics cooperation between Islamabad and Central Asian countries.

Keywords: Pakistan, Central Asia, Afghanistan, trade, interests, geo-economics, energy, CASA-1000, TAPI, transport, communications.

Introduction

Historically, Central Asia has been at the crossroads of major trade routes linking Europe and Asia. The region has also been closely linked to South Asia since ancient times.

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For the Central Asian peoples, South Asia has historically served as an equally important destination as Russia, China or the Middle East. In ancient times, a branch of the Great Silk Road led to South Asia. The ancient routes have retained their importance for thousands of years.

In the 19th century, Central Asia became the site of a clash of interests between Tsarist Russia and Britain. Known in history as the "Great Game," the confrontation led to the withdrawal of Central Asia to Russia, and the territories of modern Pakistan were finally fixed in their borders to the British Empire. Afghanistan became a buffer zone separating the spheres of influence of the two major 19th century empires, the British and the Russian. The formation of Pakistan in 1947 led to the formal establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR. During the Cold War, however, Soviet-Pakistani ties were quite strained, especially when Soviet troops were in Afghanistan. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the formation of independent states in Central Asia and its emergence as an arena of struggle for resources and influence. The interest in Central Asia stems from the fact that the region, rich in natural resources and located at the crossroads of Russia, China, South Asia and the Middle East, has faced the challenges of fragile state institutions, conflict in Afghanistan and competition from external powers in an unformed regional security system. Under the new conditions of a multipolar world, in addition to the global powers, the role of regional powers is growing, on whose actions the new security paradigm depends.

Meanwhile, the formation of independent states in Central Asia led to a revival of mutual interest and attempts to restore interregional ties. The Central Asian republics have found themselves cut off from the world ocean, and the southern direction has become the geographically shortest route to seaports. One such power is Pakistan, which has warm-water ports and energy transportation routes to India and China, and shares borders with Afghanistan, India and Iran.

Pakistan to Central Asia: Opportunities and Limitations of Cooperation

Pakistan's post-Cold War discovery of Central Asia has sparked a wave of enthusiasm for the prospect of establishing relations with Muslim countries. Pakistan can offer the states of the region the shortest access to the world's oceans. The geographical factor is complemented by the presence of a developed transport and communications network and the possibility of using the world-class ports of Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar.

Also, Pakistan's products look quite competitive in the Central Asian market with a population of over 80 million people. With safe and inexpensive

transit, Pakistan gains a new market and at the same time a source of energy resources, the permanent shortage of which negatively affects the development of the country. However, as the economies of the Central Asian states strengthen, the growing attractiveness of the Pakistani market of two hundred million is becoming evident. The importance of Central Asia depends on its strategic geographic location and enormous natural resources.[1]

Multilateral cooperation should also help strengthen relations. Pakistan's participation in the SCO allows the country to engage in regular dialogue with the governments of Central Asian republics, improve interaction, exchange views and better understand each other. In the same context, the participation of Pakistan and the Central Asian countries in China's "One Belt, One Road" project, as well as in the ECO, an organization that also brings together Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, can be considered.

The activities of this organization are focused on economic issues. According to experts at the Indian Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, the effectiveness of the ECO as a platform for interaction between Pakistan and the states of Central Asia is relatively low. According to the authors of the study, the reason for this lies in the weak economic ties between Pakistan and the states of Central Asia, as well as in the hidden competition between Pakistan, Iran and Turkey within the framework of this organization.

Another important platform for interaction between the states of Central Asia and Pakistan is CAREC, a program of regional economic cooperation in the Central Asian region that began in 1997, with a strong emphasis on cross-border economic partnerships and the development of transport infrastructure. Islamabad also seeks to support Central Asian countries through the work of the Islamic Conference.

Despite all the announced initiatives, progress and mutual desire to bring bilateral relations to a qualitatively new level, the actual results of cooperation between the states of Central Asia and Pakistan in most areas at the moment are far from the expected ones. There are several reasons for this.

Undoubtedly, the main obstacle to realizing the potential of cooperation is the situation in Afghanistan and the divergence in its prospects. Peace and security in Afghanistan is key to the growing

[1] *Farra F., Burgio C. The competitiveness potential of Central Asia*, (2011). Retrieved from: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/finance-and-investment/competitiveness-and-private-sector-development-central-asia-2011/the-competitiveness-potential-of-central-asia_9789264097285-5-en

importance of Pakistan and Central Asia for each other. In addition, there have been differences in the past over what terms peace should be and what kind of government Afghanistan should be. Another limiting factor is the lack of economic resources. Pakistan does not have the resources to claim to be a real competitor to Central Asia's leading trading partners and does not have the capacity to undertake trans-regional projects on its own. The Central Asian states also have limited resources, indicating the need for external forces to implement strategic projects.

Another fundamental problem in the relations between the states of Central Asia and Pakistan is the profound divergence of views on the role of Islamic religion in the life of the state and society. The model of an Islamic republic is unacceptable to the Central Asian states, while the concept of a secular state looks like an existential threat to Pakistan. Moreover, differences in understanding of Islamic radicalism have led Pakistan and Central Asian states to support different sides of the conflict in Afghanistan. Central Asia's secular states are wary of Islamabad's intentions. The ties between the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir groups with Pakistan and Afghanistan are of great concern to the Central Asian states.[2] Currently, these tensions have been somewhat mitigated, but all seem to retain their potential. In addition, Pakistan faces stiff competition not only from Russia or China, but also from India, Iran, and Turkey in the region, which have their own competitive advantages. Finally, stability in Afghanistan is crucial for Pakistan's involvement in Central Asia. Any attempt by Pakistan to bring pipelines or electricity from the region will not be profitable or possible until the situation in Afghanistan stabilizes.

Undoubtedly, with the political uncertainties in Afghanistan, foreign entrepreneurs will not want to invest in any project.[3] The weak infrastructure linking Pakistan and Central Asia is directly related to the situation in Afghanistan. Alternative transport projects to Afghan transit through China deprive the main advantage of the shortest access to the world ocean. Overall, Pakistan's relations with Central Asia are based on several factors, some of which facilitate cooperation and some of which limit it.

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[2] Ahmed Rashid, Afghan President Confronts Pakistani Counterpart over Suicide Bombers, (2006). Retrieved from: https://eurasianet.org/afghan-president-confronts-pakistani-counterpart-over-suicide-bombers & *Ahmed Rashid*, US-Pakistan Relations in Downward Spiral, 2006 at https://www.refworld.org/country,COI,EURASIANET,,PAK,,46f257e4c,0.html

[3] Ahmed Rashid, Karzai Embraces Risky Plan to end Afghanistan-Pakistani Antagonism, (2006). Retrieved from: http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav101206_pr.shtml

The Current State of Cooperation

At present, the Afghan factor still predetermines the difficulties in the development of cooperation between Pakistan and the Central Asian states. In the economic sphere, some improvement in trade and economic ties with the Central Asian republics can be observed, but overall trade turnover remains insignificant in the overall foreign trade picture. The most active trade partners of Pakistan are Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In 2020, trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Pakistan grew by 68.5% compared to 2019 ($27.1m) and reached $45.6m. In the first nine months of 2021 alone, bilateral trade between Kazakhstan and Pakistan increased to 39.4% compared to the same period last year ($34.5 million) and reached $48.2 million. At the same time exports increased by 85.9% and amounted to $26.6 million, while imports increased by 6.6% and amounted to $21.6 million "1.
Uzbekistan's foreign trade turnover with Pakistan increased 3.4 times between 2017 and 2020 from $36.5 million to $123.3 million. At the same time, the growth in trade turnover came at the expense of Uzbekistan's exports, which increased almost 10-fold over the period, from $10.2 million to $98.5 million.

The foreign trade turnover between the Kyrgyz Republic and Pakistan in 2021 was $8.945 million (export - $1.205 million, import - $7.743 million). Compared to the same period in 2020, trade turnover increased by 21.1%, including an increase in imports by 42.6% and a decrease in exports by 36.8%.

In the field of energy, Pakistan has traditionally been interested in Central Asian resources. However, despite the fact that two key projects in this area have decades of history, their implementation is still in an area of unrealized potential. Pakistan's importance to Central Asia's energy sector must be seen in the context of Islamabad's interest in the consumption and transit of Central Asian energy resources. Unlike Central Asia, there is a chronic energy deficit in South Asia. Pakistan and India need reliable energy at reasonable cost to sustain their economic growth. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, or trans-Afghanistan pipeline, was the first post-Cold War project aimed at exporting energy from Central Asia to South Asia. It is to supply gas from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The pipeline would connect the Yolotan-Osman gas field in Turkmenistan with the Indian city of Fazilki through Afghanistan and Pakistan.[4] In 2008, the TAPI pipeline estimated cost was

[4] Joshi, Madhura, *Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline: Possibility or Pipe Dream*, (Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, 2011), Retrieved from:https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wpcontent/uploads/2011/11/TAPI.pdf

least $7.6 billion. This project dates back to 1995, as result of a memorandum signed by Pakistan and Turkmenistan on its construction. Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan at the time also consented for this project. However, the company named Unocal, that had hoped to build the pipeline, withdrew from the project in 1998, referring human rights violations by the Taliban. As a result, the project was halted until 2002, when the next round of negotiations was intensified and Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan asked the Asian Development Bank for technical and economic support, which was completed in 2005 and updated in 2008. In the same year, India officially joined the project. The countries participating in the project were joined by the United States, which was interested in strengthening security in Afghanistan and disrupting the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. Nevertheless, the TAPI project still remains unrealized.

The Central Asia-South Asia Transmission Project (CASA-1000) is a project to export electricity from Central Asia to South Asia. Initially, these were to be transmission lines that export 1,000 to 1,300 MW of electricity produced in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan annually, beginning in 2015.[5] The World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, and USAID have pledged to finance the project. In 2011, a CASA-1000 feasibility study was provided by SNC-Lavalin International at the request of the World Bank. As for project implementation, it, like TAPI, faces obstacles that make it doubtful that these grand projects will ever be realized. The main problems boil down to security, diplomatic tensions between participating countries and lack of adequate finances for implementation. Protecting pipelines and power lines in Afghanistan seems to be quite a challenge.[6]

The Taliban have so far demonstrated the ability to control the situation in the country, which can serve as a good basis for the implementation of projects, and the need for this was recognized even during the period when U.S. forces were in Afghanistan. Already at that time, funds for CASA-1000 were allocated by international financial institutions and USAID. However, the costs were increasing because

[5] Vinokurov E., Ahunbaev A., Usmanov, N., Cukarev T., Sarsembekov T. Investicii v vodno-energetic heskij kompleks Central'nojAzii. Dokladyirabochiedo kumenty 21/3. Almaty, Evrazijskij bank razvitiya, (2021). *Nematov A.*Stroitel'stvodorogi «Mazari-SHarif – Kabul – Peshavar» pozvolitsokratit' transporti rovkugruzoviz Uzbekistana v Pakistan s 35 do 3-5 dnej, 20 maya 2021// https://isrs.uz/ru/yangiliklar/ismi-stroitelstvo-dorogi-mazari-sarif-kabul-pesavar-pozvolit-sokratit-transportirovku-gruzov-iz-uzbekistana-v-pakistan-s-35-do-3-5-dnei

[6] Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "The TAPI Pipeline: A Recipe for Peace or Instability?," *ISAS Brief 194* (2011): 3

security concerns were the main reason for the increase in costs.[7] Still, the project continued to be funded. Diplomatic tensions could also hinder the development of TAPI and, to a lesser extent, CASA-1000. Rivalry between Pakistan and India remains an obstacle, and frequent clashes on the border between the two countries in Kashmir point to continuing tensions and instability that undermine inter-regional cooperation.[8]. The clash of Indian and Pakistani interests in Afghanistan has increased antagonism and mutual mistrust in the region.[9] Overall, the current state of cooperation is still determined by the factor of instability in Afghanistan. The problem remains the recognition of the Afghan government and its ability to maintain stability and security and its ability to negotiate. In this regard, cooperation between Pakistan and Central Asian countries is still ambitious in theory but modest in practice.

Central Asia and South Asia

As hopes for the end of the conflict in Afghanistan grew, attempts to revive trans-Afghanistan projects intensified. In 2021, an international conference on "Central Asia and South Asia: Regional Interconnection: Challenges and Opportunities" was held in Tashkent, where Uzbek President Sh.Mirziyoyev emphasized the strategic importance of South Asia as a priority of his foreign policy.

According to Mirziyoyev, *the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar railroad has the potential to become the main "architecture" of closer regional communication between Central Asia and South Asia*. He emphasized that the construction of the railroad would fully realize the transit potential of the Central and South Asian region, provide the "shortest route" and "economic viability" of the route for transporting goods between South and Central Asia. According to Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade, the World Bank has expressed willingness to finance field work and provide technical assistance in designing the construction of a railway network between the three countries of the region - Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade valued the project at $4.8 billion to $5 billion. Estimated delivery time

[7] Petersen, Alexander. "TAPI pipeline: Bigger is not better," *Foreign Policy*, (June 12, 2012). Retrieved from: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/06/12/tapi_pipeline_bigger_is_not_better

[8] Fayaz Bukhari, Five more civilians killed in worst India-Pakistan fighting for years, *Reuters*, (October 8, 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-india-pakistan-idAFKCN0HX10H20141008

[9] William Dalrymple. *A Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India*, (The Brookings Essay, June 25, 2013). Retrieved from: http://csweb.brookings.edu/content/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india-c.html

of goods from the Russian border (Ozinki) to Karachi will be reduced to 6-18 days, and from Termez to Karachi to only 8-10 days. The potential of the Kabul corridor route together with the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan transport corridor allows us to talk about connecting Europe, China, Russia and South Asia. With the growing interconnectedness between the states, there is a need to strengthen not only regional ties, but also inter-regional ties.[10] In order to implement the project, the governments of Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a joint letter requesting a $4.8 billion loan from international financial institutions.[11] However, a month later, the Afghan government, which signed the agreement, was no more. Under the new conditions, for international institutions to agree to finance large-scale trans-Afghan projects, international recognition of the Taliban government, their ability to provide security both in their country and to guarantee that the government will not pose a threat to neighboring states are required. Nevertheless, trans-Afghanistan projects seem to be in a better position now than they were a few years ago. First of all, we should note the actual end of military operations in Afghanistan. Of course, the situation still seems fragile, but at present it makes practical sense to agree on cooperation only with the Taliban. Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan agree that the Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar trans-regional railroad is indeed a platform for economic growth and greater regional connectivity, and are ready for its joint implementation. Moreover, the countries are willing to pursue lower-cost projects, such as building power lines or developing road links through Afghanistan, which is also a good basis for enhancing cooperation.

Conclusion

Pakistan views Central Asia as an important but largely unrealized area of its foreign policy. The relationship is fairly stable, albeit modest for the scale of the participants. The Afghan conflict has remained a major factor hindering the realization of existing potential. Stability and security in Afghanistan is a priority for Pakistan and the Central Asian countries, and achieving these goals will allow the "reanimation" of "frozen" trans-Afghan energy and transport communications projects. At present, in the absence of international recognition of the Taliban government, large-scale projects are

[10] Nematov A.Stroitel'stvodorogi «Mazari-SHarif – Kabul – Peshavar» pozvolitsokratit' transporti rovkugruzoviz Uzbekistana v Pakistan s 35 do(3-5 dnej, 20 maya 2021). Retrieved from: https://isrs.uz/ru/yangiliklar/ismi-stroitelstvo-dorogi-mazari-sarif-kabul-pesavar-pozvolit-sokratit-transportirovku-gruzov-iz-uzbekistana-v-pakistan-s-35-do-3-5-dnei

[11] Abaturov Viktor, Tashkent skijperekrestok sotrudnichestva — mezhdu Central' nojiY Uzhnoj Aziej, (CEIR, 2021). Retrieved from: https://www.cer.uz/uz/post/publication/taskentskij-perekrestok-sotrudnicestva-mezdu-centralnoj-i-uznoj-aziej

not possible due to the limited resources of Pakistan and the Central Asian states. Nevertheless, the persistent attempts by Uzbekistan and Pakistan to seize the opportunities for peace in Afghanistan point to the possibility of some positive changes in the implementation of those projects and initiatives that these countries are able to implement without the involvement of international financial institutions.

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GEO-POLITICS OF AFGHANISTAN UNDER TALIBAN REGIME: PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Taliban seized power in Kabul on 15th August 2021 after the abrupt pulling out of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. Taliban assured international community about the human rights protection, women education, freedom of media, and no use of Afghan soil by terrorists against any other country. These assurances appraised international community not to oppose their regime. However, after more than a year has passed, future of Afghanistan is still uncertain. This study tries to analyse the geo-politics of Afghanistan after the fall of Kabul to Taliban. It tries to explore the reasons for non-confrontationist policies by the neighboring states as well as regional powers. Qualitative methodology with secondary sources has been used in this research. Findings of the research reveal that despite assurances by Taliban regime, Afghanistan is gradually plunging into the similar situation of 1990s. However, from regional integration perspective, there are high hopes that it can act as bridge between Central and South Asia and China with the Persian Gulf. Regional countries must contribute for the peace and development of Afghanistan by supporting the people of Afghanistan to decide their future. Afghanistan can either be a roundabout or a dead end street for the regional states that depends on the region's policies towards it.

Keywords: US Withdrawal, Taliban, Afghanistan, Economic Development, Regional, Central Asia, Pakistan, China, Russia

Introduction

The situation in Afghanistan is heart wrenching, even after spending $2 trillion USD and external assistance, the country is still in crisis. The 20 years so called "War on Terror" launched by the US after 9/11 came to an

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end with abrupt pull out of US troops and its allies from Afghanistan. Taliban's takeover of Kabul has brought an end to the US backed government and two decades of American era in Afghanistan. As a result, President Ashraf Ghani fled from Afghanistan, leaving poor Afghanis at the mercy of chaos and anarchy. The situation which the world observed in the midst of August of 2021 at Hamid Karzai International Airport was a real mess and an example of statelessness.[1] After two decades of bitter experiences while fighting against the "foreign occupation forces" and being captive at Guantanamo Bay Prison, Taliban have shown relatively a softer side this time. Announcements in the first press conference, such as promise to ensure women's rights, freedom of media was considered as a good omen for peace and development in the war-ravaged country, but female students have been banned to Universities and colleges. Whereas giving general amnesty to everyone prevented chaos and bloodshed in the country.[2]

It is true that Taliban's government has emerged to be the first ever since 1973 to control almost the whole country. However, Taliban ascendance to power led to freezing of Afghanistan's assets by United States and halted aid by IMF and the World Bank. Since, Afghanistan's economy was primarily based on external aid and assistance for 20 years, Taliban are unable to manage the outcome of economic crisis. Weak economic conditions pose a great challenge not only to their government but also to the Afghan society.[3] The region and countries close to Afghanistan are affected directly by the instability in Afghanistan and to avoid Afghanistan plunging into a battlefield once again, important regional actors like Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia and Central Asian states are advocating for stable Afghanistan at various multilateral platform. All have engaged Taliban leadership in negotiations as well.

After Taliban seizing power in Kabul, factions like *"Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan"* (TTP) resurfaced which is a matter of concern for Pakistan and can put China's long-term investment in the region at stake.[4] Therefore, People's Republic of China is amongst the first to provide $31 million of financial assistance to Taliban Regime. In addition to this Pakistan has also

[1]David Zucchino, "Kabul's Sudden Fall to Taliban Ends U.S. Era in Afghanistan" *The New York Times*, (August 15, 2021). https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-surrender.html

[2] Thomas Ruttig, *"Have Taliban Changed?"* (Combating Terrorism Center, March 2021). https://www.ctc.usma.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/

[3] Catherine Putz, "Taliban Takeover: World Bank and IMF Halt Aid; US Freezes Afghan Assets" *The Diplomat*, (August 26, 2021). https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/taliban-takeover-world-bank-and-imf-halt-aid-us-freezes-afghan-assets/

[4] Abdul Sayed, *"The Evolution and Future of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan*", (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 21, 2021). https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051

provided relief goods to Afghanistan.[5] On the other hand, Russia and Central Asia also ensured to help Afghanistan out of current difficulties because re-emergence of militant groups in Central Asian Republics will destabilize regimes of Central Asia and its connectivity with the energy hungry South Asia.[6] Keeping aforementioned motives in view, these states have shown interest to fill the vacuum by harnessing the economic potential of South Asia and Central Asia through Afghanistan.[7]

Background

The word Taliban in Pashto means "students", which emerged on the world stage in early 1990s after the withdrawal of USSR, which also led to the collapse of communist regime in Afghanistan and rise of civil disorder. Taliban arose as a small force of group in Afghanistan consisting religious scholars and its followers aiming to fight against crime and corruption. Since, most of the locals in Afghanistan found harmony under Islamic rhetoric by mujahideen and madrassahs in south of Afghanistan. These factions in late 1996 had an effective control over the two-thirds of Afghanistan and its capital Kabul by declaring Afghanistan as Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.[8] Despite of Taliban's punitive acts such as executing incumbent President "Muhammad Najeebullah", implementation of *Pashtunwali*,[9]marginalization of women in Afghanistan and instituting strict Islamic laws derived from interpretation of Quranic verses fit in to their beliefs, unforgiving punishments and suppression of political opponents by force, Kingdom of Saudi Arab, Pakistan and UAE recognized Taliban's regime.[10]

Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were held responsible for 9/11. The US asked Taliban to handover Bin Laden, who had been hiding in Afghanistan,

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[5] Charlotte Greenfield, "Analysis: As West ponders aid for Afghanistan, China and Pakistan quick to provide" *Reuters*, (September 13, 2021). https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/west-ponders-aid-afghanistan-china-pakistan-quick-provide-relief-2021-09-12/

[6]Country Report, "*Central Asia and Russia exposed to Afghanistan Instability*" (Economist Intelligence Unit N.A. Incorporated, July 19, 2021). https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.library.astate.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=akstateu1&id=GALE|A670324648&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon

[7]"Pakistan hosts US, China, Russia to Discuss Afghanistan" *Aljazeera*, (November 11, 2021). https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/11/pakistans-hosts-us-china-russia-to-discuss-afghanistan

[8] Fayaz Hussain, "Implications of the Enigmatic Rise of Taliban: A Historical Perspective"*Global Regional Review*, (2021). https://www.grrjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rvIolA2LALJouq9hkR/9arnhiiFbU.pdf

[9]**Pashtunwali** (Pashto: پښتونولي) is the traditional lifestyle and is best described as a code of honor of the Pashtun people, by which they live.

[10] Clayton Thomas, "*Taliban Government in Afghanistan: Background and Issues for Congress*" (Congressional Research Service, November 02, 2021). https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46955

but Taliban refused to hand him over. As a result, United States and its allies on October 7, 2001 started "Operation Enduring Freedom" to fight against Taliban and their supporters.[11] The United States successfully toppled Taliban's regime and established transitional government. While United States and its allies were busy in reconstructing Afghanistan and focusing on preparing new constitution for Afghanistan, Taliban were regrouping and getting stronger. Taliban started to wage war against the established US backed government in Afghanistan while surviving against the NATO. These counterinsurgency operations have resulted in killing of more than 6000 US combatants, 1100 NATO soldiers, 47000 civilians, and more than 73000 Afghanistan's military and paramilitary troops.[12]

The instability in Afghanistan had catastrophic impacts on the whole region resulting in growing Islamic fundamentalism, transnational terrorism, extremism, poverty in Afghanistan, flow of refugees into neighboring countries, increased drug trafficking, illicit trade affecting the trade and commerce which had adverse impact on growth rate of Afghanistan as well neighboring countries, hindering development projects, and above all detaching energy deprived South Asia from highly enriched Central Asia.[13] Peace talks started under the Trump's administration, and in 2020 under US-Taliban agreement, United States ensured to pull all of its forces from Afghanistan if Taliban fulfill its commitments including ending ties with terrorists organizations. Whereas, in August 2021, under Biden's administration the abrupt pull out of US forces completed leaving Afghanistan muddled in economic and humanitarian crisis again.[14]

Afghanistan's Geo-Strategic Importance

Afghanistan used to serve as natural corridor between Indian subcontinent and Persian Gulf and Central Asia. However, today it is termed as "Crossroad of Routes in Asia".[15] The foremost reason is because Afghanistan is situated at the epicenter of Middle East, South and Central Asia, including China. The country also possesses highly remunerative raw

[11] Ben Smith and Thorp Arabella, "*The legal basis for the invasion of Afghanistan*" (House Of Commons Library, February 26, 2010). https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05340/SN05340.pdf

[12] Lindsay Maizland, *"The Taliban in Afghanistan*" (Council on Foreign Relations, September 15, 2021). https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan

[13] Raj Verma, "Instability in Afghanistan and Non-Traditional Security Threats: A Public Good Problem?" *Global Policy*, March 11, 2022. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.13044

[14] Lindsay Maizland, *"The Taliban in Afghanistan*" (Council on Foreign Relations, September 15, 2021). https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan

[15] "*Geopolitical Analysis of Afghanistan*" (Spanish Institute For Strategic Studies, April 2011). Retrieved https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA12-2011_Geopolitica_AFganistan_GBBallesteros_ENGLISH.pdf

materials such as copper and lithium. Additionally, Afghanistan is located at the junction of states aiming to be regional hegemon such as, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and Russia. These regional leaders bestow great attention to Afghanistan keeping its geopolitical as well as geostrategic significance.[16] However, the significant factor in term of regional framework is the US withdrawal and Taliban rise to power in Afghanistan.

Keeping the current situation in view, incorporation of Afghanistan into regional economic process is essential requirement for regional peace, security and connectivity. It is important to highlight that instability in Afghanistan not only threatens the region but also challenges global security as it did in 1990s.[17] The abrupt withdrawal of United States has jeopardized the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan once again is in a condition where economy is crippled and security is paralyzed, the naive Taliban's government without any expertise is running the country. Afghanistan, despite being the landlocked country has geostrategic significance, chaos and instability in Afghanistan would have far stretched impacts across the region. Therefore, it is not wrong to mention that it has become regional states responsibility to formulate state policies towards Afghanistan in order to maintain peace and achieve regional connectivity.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is used in this research to analyse the data for better understanding of the context, opinions and experiences. The research relies on the data from secondary sources available since there is non-availability of primary source data and official state documents. Internationally known journals, online analysts' articles and newspaper reports are utilized instead of primary state sources as there is a control of the regime over the published writings and a biased point of view is noticeable. However, about half of the data incorporated is extracted from the internationally recognized newspaper reports; hence these can be categorized as primary and secondary source as well. This consideration of perceiving it as primary and secondary source depends upon the inference made by the scholar going through the research article.

Literature Review

Naz and Jaspal have assessed how Trump's policy towards Afghanistan is giving rise to problems in Afghanistan. They observed the growing influence of Afghanistan's neighboring countries and great powers

[16] Dr. Julian Voje, "Afghanistan Geopolitical Hotspot", *Munich Security Conference,* August 24, 2021. https://securityconference.org/en/media/msc-blog/article/afghanistan-geopolitical-hotspot/

[17] Shabir Ahmad Khan, "The Emerging Regional Geo-Political and Geo-Economic Scenario In Central Asia", *National Herald Tribune,* (June 15, 2022). https://dailynht.com/news/story/94498

interference in Afghanistan affairs to achieve their prior objectives. They are convinced to believe that all actors want to eradicate terrorism from Afghanistan but have opposing policies keeping their interests in view.[18] As a result, Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) failed to prevent the rise of Taliban. As mentioned by Cordesman and Hwang, despite of United States efforts Afghan forces are still weak to sustain in peace and conflict without US presence.[19] As it was noted by Shahrani during Karzai regime that in the absence of international troops, Taliban are expected to rise again and will try replace Karzai thugocracy with Taliban's theocracy.[20] For Safi, this raised anxiety amongst the people of Afghanistan because in her opinion, this will strengthen terrorist organizations therefore, for Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) sustainability, international support is necessary to bring stability in Afghanistan.[21] Before Taliban assuming power in Afghanistan, the state was already undergoing economic crisis and political instability. According to World Bank data, derailing security situation, third wave of COVID-19 and climate change have affected agricultural production and reduced economic growth to August 2021[22] but as prophesied by Max Boot, complete US withdrawal would allow Taliban to overthrow Afghanistan's government and threatens the people of Afghan society especially the women who are not willing to live under Taliban's regime.[23]

Regional scholars apprehended situation in Afghanistan with noting the changing dynamics of the region. While taking geostrategic location of Afghanistan into account, Nasreen considered Pakistan as a significant neighboring country of Afghanistan. According to her, Afghanistan's war hindered regional development and jeopardize regional security.[24] The rise

[18] Samra Naz, Nawaz Jaspal Zafar, *"Afghanistan in The Snare of External Power Struggle*", (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Autumn 2018). https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2-SS_Samra_naz_and_Zafar_Nawaz_Jaspal_No-3_2018.pdf

[19] Anthony H. Cordesman and Hwang Grace, "*Afghan National Defense and Security Forces That Are Not ready to Stand Alone- In War or Peace*" (CSIS, July 07, 2020). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep25320.9

[20] Nazif M. Shahrani, "The Impact of the 2014 U.S.-NATO Withdrawal on the Internal Politics of Afghanistan: Karzai-style Thugocracy or Taliban Theocracy?"*Asian Survey,* (March/April 2015). https://online.ucpress.edu/as/article-abstract/55/2/273/24792/The-Impact-of-the-2014-U-S-NATO-Withdrawal-on-the?redirectedFrom=fulltext

[21] Mariam Safi, "*Afghanistan, US And The Peace Process: A Deal With The Taliban in 2014?*", (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. January 28, 2014). http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4275

[22]"Afghanistan", *World Bank,* accessed on January 1, 2022, October 08, 2021. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1

[23] Max Boot, "*Biden's 9/11 Withdrawal from Afghanistan: What to Know*", (Council on Foreign Relations, April 5, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31147

[24] Nasreen Akhtar, "Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Taliban", *International Journal on World Peace,* (December 2008). https://www.jstor.org/stable/20752859

of ISIS in the midst of war has been another challenge for regional states, while taking Afghanistan, Pakistan, South and Central Asia into consideration, for Kashif Afghanistan being the war-torn state with fragile economy and poor governance made the risk of ISIS expansion comparatively more genuine.[25] Similarly, Bobokulov viewed Islamic State (IS) and Taliban presence in Afghanistan as a threat to Afghanistan's complex security situation which led to "hybrid war" and considered immediate threat to neighboring Central Asian states.[26] Thomas Kunze, Michail Logvinov and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung viewed ISAF troop withdrawal from Afghanistan as an opportunity for Central Asian Republics. Owing to fragile security and expansion of terrorist groups, they were of the view that Central Asian republics would enhance cooperation through an organization like SCO, CSTO and NATO.[27] In addition to this, Trenin and Malashenko have observed the prevailing "Afghan syndrome" in Moscow before engaging with Afghanistan.[28] Whereas, Ahmad Majidyar and Ali Alfoneh noted how Iran played Afghan refugee card as an instrument to mold Afghanistan policies in favour of Tehran at the expense of US. In their opinion, Tehran has been destabilizing the region by such policies and halting US led efforts in Afghanistan.[29] This is because Tehran approach towards Afghanistan is entirely security centric and any deterioration of US influence in Afghanistan is considered as success for Iran.[30] Reckoning Beijing's security and economic concerns, Zhao Hong has examined China's readiness to demonstrate its responsibility in the world affair through its "March West Strategy" which he believed to yield positive outcomes and establish new kind of Sino-US relationship based on cooperation and

[25] Kashif Mumtaz, *"ISIS: Assessment of the Threat for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia*", (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2016). http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/1-kashfi_mumtaz_SS_Vol_36_No.1_2016.pdf

[26] Ivan Safranchuk," *Security Threats For the Central Asian Neighbors of Afghanistan: A Reality Check*", (Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2017). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23168.6

[27] Thomas Kunze, Logvinov Michail, *"Central Asia facing ISAF Withdrawal from Afghanistan"*, (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. 2013). https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/zentralasien-vor-dem-isaf-abzug-aus-afghanistan1

[28] Dmitri Trenin, Malashenko Alexei, "*Russia's Policies in Support of its Own Interests*", (*Carnegie Moscow Center*. 2010). https://carnegieendowment.org/files/trenin_afghan_final.pdf

[29] Ahmad Majidyar, Alfoneh Ali, "*Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Refugees as Political Instrument"*, (American Enterprise Institute, November 08, 2010). https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/iranian-influence-in-afghanistan-2/

[30] Alex vatanka, *"Iran's Bottom Line in Afghanistan"*, (Atlantic Council, November 09, 2017). https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/iran-s-bottom-line-in-afghanistan/

balanced approach in Afghanistan.[31] Since then, Zaho Huasheng has undertaken Afghanistan prominent position in Chinese foreign policy under new neighbourhood diplomacy initiated by Xi Jinping in 2013 keeping NATO withdrawal and BRI project in view.[32] According to Zhu Yongbiao, China is more actively involved in Afghanistan and believed to have cooperation between Sino and United States on Afghanistan.[33]

Adhering to the recent developments in Afghanistan, Saxena outlines Indian position after the fall of Kabul, according to her Taliban's takeover has shattering impact on geostrategic interest of India and this might leads India to reshape its policies according to the changing regional dynamics.[34] Iftekharul Bashar explains how Taliban's takeover has a far stretched security implications for Bangladesh, according to him, Taliban's rise will empower extremism with whom they have ideological and religious association. Therefore, proactive check on flow of people, effective surveillance and strong border security is required.[35] But heeding to Afghanistan's civil economic condition, the state has disrupted United States efforts.[36] Furthermore, Raffaello Pantucci and Abdul Basit considers Taliban's success as the success of Al-Qaeda and its interpretation of Jihad, the authors also reiterates on the complex landscape existing threats, according to them, the focus is more now on region and they have drawn the jihadist landscapes of South Asia, Southeast and Central Asia, also in Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America.[37] However, according to Elizabeth Threlkeld and Grace Easterly, future stability in Afghanistan depends on the bilateral relation of Afghanistan-Pakistan and United States

[31] Zhao Hong, "China's Afghan Policy: The Forming of The "March West" Strategy?", *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, (Fall/Winter 2013). https://www.jstor.org/stable/23722399

[32] Zhao Huasheng, "*Afghanistan and China's New Neighbourhood Diplomacy*", (Royal Institute of International Affair, July 2016). http://ciss.tsinghua.edu.cn/upload_files/atta/1626330706550_FB.pdf

[33] Zhu Yongbliao, "China's Afghanistan Policy Since 9/11", *Asian Survey*, (March/April 2018). https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26494047

[34] Chayanika Saxena, "*The American Exit, the Fall of Afghanistan and the Indian Dilemmas"* (International Centre For Political Violence And Terrorism Research, September, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618777

[35] Iftekharul Bashar, *"Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan: Security Implications for Bangladesh*" (International Centre For Political Violence And Terrorism Research, September, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48618779

[36] Anthony H. Cordesman, "*A Failed State Created a Failed Economy",* (CSIS, August 09, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep33746.6.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Adbe7d8c85729d7fe0bb978462cdd9ce8

[37] Raffaello Pantucci and Basit Abdul, "*Post-Taliban Takeover: How the Global Jihadist Terror Threat May Evolve*" (International Centre For Political Violence and Terrorism Research, September, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/48618776

engagement to formulate suitable outcome.[38] But this research tries to explore how peace and economic development in Afghanistan can be achieved under the Taliban regime.

Theoretical Framework

In the wake of globalized world, the word "dependence" and "interdependence" is more often used by scholars, researchers and political analysts. The actors in international system realized that principles of attaining actual power are something beyond hard power, which entails stable economic system and technological advancement. As a result, scholars from Liberal and Realist schools of thoughts came up with contradictory arguments to influence each other's point of view.[39]

Considering prevailing global trends, Complex Interdependence Theory proposed by Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in 1970s, became a central constituent to understand the behaviour of states vis-à-vis transnational actors. It is inductive clarification of Liberalism and Realism to explain the international structure where policies of one actor are determined by actions of other actors and vice-versa.[40] This means that actors are dependent on each other in a complex interdependent world.

Keohane and Nye explains why states willingly enter into alliance or cooperate with each other by emphasizing on global political economy, relations between transnational actors' visa-a-vis transnational governments, and upholding cooperation at international level. Consequently, in the contemporary world complex relations amongst countries and their interests is evident. This theory also includes non-state actors as a significant actor of international system. It also entails to add social welfare of the society on international political agenda.[41]

Liberalism and Realism, being the traditional theories having its prior focus on the states have ignored to observe the agency of individuals especially elites (leaders and influential citizens) in the Post-Cold War era. In this regard, Constructivism argues that the states consist of actors, mainly

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[38] Elizabeth Threlkeld and Easterly Grace, "*Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties and Future Stability in Afghanistan*", (US Institute Of Peace, August 01, 2021). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep34025.7

[39] Huseyin Isiksal, "To What Extend Interdependence Theorists Challenge to Structural Realist School of International Relations", *Alternatives,* (Summers & Falls 2004). https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/tjir/v3n2_3/tjir_v3n2_3ish01.html

[40] Robert O. Keohane, S, Nye Joseph, "*Power and Interdependence* (Second Edition)", (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989): 3-39,58
https://hostnezt.com/cssfiles/internationalrelations/Power%20and%20Interdependency%20Keohane%20and%20Nye.pdf

[41] Robert O. Keohane, S, Nye Joseph, "Power and Interdependence (Second Edition)", pp.3-39,58 Harper Collins Publishers New York, 1989.
https://hostnezt.com/cssfiles/internationalrelations/Power%20and%20Interdependency%20Keohane%20and%20Nye.pdf

powerful elites, and they are continuously shaping the international system in which they interact with other actors.[42] Nicholas Onuf, being the prominent figure in Constructivism School of thought has observed that the world is socially constructed.

In addition to this, Alexander Wendt argues that identity is also socially constructed based on ideational structure not material structure. According to Constructivism agency (powerful elites and leaders in decision making) and international structure are mutually constituted based on how they perceive the actions of other actors whether in terms of animosity or goodwill gesture.[43] Hence, anarchy is also socially constructed, and it is what agency make of it. Therefore, states have multiple identities. From this perspective, it can be noted that the states in proximity to Afghanistan may use humanitarian challenges posing to be negative by the new regime as an opportunity; followed by help in constructing a balanced image of a prospering Afghanistan which offers advantages and peace to the region itself.

Similarly, Taking Complex Interdependence and Constructive Schools of thoughts into consideration, Afghanistan is positioned at the epicenter of Middle East, Central and South Asia. Policies or actions from Afghanistan have profound impacts on the regional states adjacent to Afghanistan. As the region has witnessed instability caused by the "War on Terror", counterinsurgency and again the rise of Taliban, leading to refugee crisis, drugs trafficking, security crisis etc. Studying Afghanistan through the lens of Complex Interdependence and

Constructivism theoretical framework provides a clear vision that why regional actors like China, Pakistan, Iran, Russia and Central Asian states are more concerned of bringing peace in Afghanistan as compared to the western allies which left the country without giving a future plan. For example, Pakistan hosts 1.4 million Afghan refugees according to UNHCR statistics.[44] Pakistan has suffered from many terrorist attacks and has lost more than 70,000 people already. Iran also hosts 780,000 Afghan refugees.[45] As it is a burden on their economy as well, Tehran fears the infiltrating of Islamic State Khorasan Province as refugees into Iran. Beijing is more vigilant to secure vested interest in the region as compared to 1990s where China did not recognize Taliban regime. This has increased Chinese

[42] Sarina Theys, "Introducing Constructivism in International Relations Theory", *E-International Relations*, February 18, 2018. https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/23/introducing-constructivism-in-international-relations-theory/

[43] Ian Hurd, *"Constructivism*", (Oxford University Press, 2008): 298-313 https://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/ihu355/Home_files/17-Smit-Snidal-c17.pdf

[44] UNHCR, "*Pakistan*" accessed on 21 December, 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/pakistan.html

[45] UNHCR, *Iran*" accessed on 21 December, 2021. https://www.unhcr.org/ir/refugees-in-iran/

concerns about cross-border terrorism because they cannot afford instability in Afghanistan as it has direct impact and spill over impact into Xinjiang.[46] Russia which fought in Afghanistan during 1979-89 is also cognizant of the spillover effect of the instability in the region which can damage its interest. Apart from this, Russia is also concerned about infiltration of Islamic extremism in the Central Asia which they faced during the Cold War.[47]
The Central Asian States also faced extremism and terrorism with respect to the instability in Afghanistan as many of the terrorist organizations have close linkages across the regions.[48] In addition to this, constructivism argues about the identity is what leaders or elites makes of it similarly Afghanistan under Taliban regime despite of its harsh domestic policies and socio-economic crisis regional actors stance is considerably different because they believe Afghanistan being at the Center, their policies have far-stretched consequences on the social, political and economic policies of the states in the region.
Leaders from China, Russia, Central Asian States and even Iran refrained to recognize Taliban's previous regimes are indulging Taliban in negotiations keeping their interest in view. For them, Afghanistan's new identity of this new decade in the 21st century depends on how Taliban interact with them because the core objective of Taliban regime is survival and regional actors have their own core interests keeping Afghanistan's geopolitics in view. In this regard, Complex Interdependence and Constructivism provides an adequate explanation of this contemporary Taliban rise.

The Fall of Kabul and Emerging Challenges

In the year 2018, the confidential report by United States intelligence revealed that the abrupt pull out of forces might lead to the revival of Taliban and civil war but President Trump stressed on negotiating with Taliban in return of cutting off ties with all terrorist organizations in future.[49] The United States concluded war under Biden's administration, considering it as unnecessary burden. However, President Biden assumed Afghan forces are well trained to confront Taliban but it failed to prevent the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban. Since, President Biden was unable to

[46] Andrew Scobell, "*China and the U.S Exit from Afghanistan: Not a Zero-Sum Outcome*" (United States Institute Of Peace, September 22, 2021). https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/china-and-us-exit-afghanistan-not-zero-sum-outcome

[47] Paul Stronski "*What Does the Kremlin Really Think About Afghanistan?"* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 30, 2021). https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/30/forget-schadenfreude.-what-does-kremlin-really-think-about-afghanistan-pub-85230

[48] Ibid

[49] Dion Nissenbaum, Gurdon Lubold, "Military Believes Trump's Afghan War Plan Is Working but Spy Agencies Are Pessimistic"*The Wall Street Journal*, (August 31, 2018). http://on.wsj.com/3xOoAHX

manage the outcome; this led to the evacuation of US embassy staff with the assistance of 3000 US troops on August 12, 2021. On the other hand, Taliban forces seized the opportunity to gain complete control of Kabul on August 15, 2021.[50] The fall of Kabul in 2021 is considered as a major historical failure for the United States and its allies till date.

Moreover, the sudden departure of President Ghani from the country, who continuously vowed to "fight till the end", caused disarray amongst politicians and its people. This created a power vacuum; as a result Taliban took over *Arg*, Kabul and assumed the authority of the state. Soon after realizing Taliban's rise to power in Kabul, the United States, Germany and Western allies suspended their aid to Afghanistan. This led to most formidable economic crisis because as per World Bank statistics 40% of Afghanistan's GDP ($4.284 billion) was dependent on foreign aid and assistance.[51] In addition to this, foreign exchange reserves amounting $9.5 billion, as per IMF statistics, were frozen by United States Federal Reserves which has led to the condition where Afghanistan's Central Bank is no more capable of handling the exchange rate leading to a collapse of local currency and steady rise in inflation. IMF's Spokesperson, Gerry Rice, on August 18, 2021 announced that looking at the prevailing situation of Afghanistan; the country is unable to access IMF resources (known as Special Drawing Rights). SDR included $450 million share from the global IMF quota [52]SDR would have resolved the problems like balance of payments and helpful in managing the fresh government. The donors such as Germany, France and World Bank halted all of their disbursements. Due to these challenges, Taliban's government found it difficult to meet the basic needs of Afghan people. Taliban government is unable to combat these internal and external challenges by its own. Hence, Taliban regime is desperately looking for foreign engagements.

The Reincarnation of Taliban and Afghanistan in 21st Century

The rise and fall of Taliban to the reincarnation of Taliban regime in Kabul is termed as Taliban 2.0. Taliban 2.0 with seizing quick victory has stunned the world. Though numerous views the past trajectory record of Taliban reign (1996-2001) as wicked and immoral. However, assuming the future policies of Taliban would be the same as they were implementing before their regime was toppled in 2001 is a matter of concern for everyone. To address this, Taliban today are not the same as they used to be mid-1990s. Similarly, Afghanistan today has changed too. The infrastructure of

[50]"*The U.S War in Afghanistan:1999-2021*", (The Council of Foreign Relations), https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan

[51]World Bank, *GDP Afghanistan 2020*", https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?locations=AF

[52] IMF, *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan",* (August 18, 2021). https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/AFG

Afghanistan is more developed as compared to the infrastructure back in 1996. For example, USAID has maintained the current infrastructure which allows people to move easily. Afghanistan has Tarakhil Power Plant built by USAID in 2009 has a capacity of providing reliable electricity to 660,000 residents in Kabul.[53] Kandahar Helmand Power Project under USAID ensured power load accommodation in Afghanistan's Southern Electric Power System (SEPS) to overcome the problem of low-voltage disruption system and also upgraded Kajaki's control systems to provide affordable electric energy supply to locals, governmental and private sector offices in the province of Helmand and Kandahar.[54]

The Ashraf Ghani government in 2017 inaugurated transmission projects which was aim to provide direct access of imported electricity to the people living in Ghazni with capacity of 220 KV transmission lines under North East Power System (NEPS) -South East Power System (SEPS) interconnection Projects as a part of larger Power Transmission Expansion and Connectivity (PTEC), PTEC was sponsored by USAID and Asian Development Bank.[55] In addition to this, Afghanistan today is blessed with its solar plant installed in Kandahar that is providing clean drinking water to 75,000 people.[56] The roads are constructed and upgraded (more than 2,000km) which links the populous provinces of Afghanistan. These roads are linking, facilitating commerce and movement of people across the country.[57] Apart from this, during the first reign of Taliban (1996-2001) people remained aloof of the emerging trends and modern concepts but today Afghanistan is connected with the outer world and is aware of the happenings around the globe through internet.

Taliban themselves lacked recognition, so in 2005 they launched an official website named "*Al-Emaraha*" headed by Zabiullah Mujahid. Currently, Zaibiullah Mujahid has more than 371,000 followers on Twitter. They have learned the art of staying connected with the world. The adaption of social media platforms and its techniques have proven to be successful in swift ascent and diplomatic legitimacy.[58] In short, they have learnt the tactics of information warfare which is being used by them to project their point of view locally and internationally. Once in power, Taliban promised to ensure

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[53] USAID, *"Tarakhil Power Plant"*, (May 07, 2019). https://www.usaid.gov/node/51751

[54] USAID, "*Kandahar Helmand Power Project*", (USAID, May 07, 2019). https://www.usaid.gov/node/51621

[55]"Afghanistan Network Extended to Link National Grid to Ghazni", *Global Transmission Report*, (January 11, 2018). https://www.globaltransmission.info/archive.php?id=32089

[56]USAID, *"Afghanistan Infrastructure"* (USAID, November 19, 2021). https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/infrastructure

[57] Ibid

[58] Emerson T. Brooking, "Before the Taliban took Afghanistan, it took the internet" *New Atlanticist*, (August 26, 2021). https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/before-the-taliban-took-afghanistan-it-took-the-internet/

women's right, freedom of media, and supporting NGO's. They willingly showed more political openness as compared to their previous regime. General amnesty to everyone has proven that they are now determined to settle the disputes by table talks and open diplomacy but their ban on women education has raised the alarms across the whole world. The two decades ousted Taliban from Power and had maintained contact with tribes other than Pashtuns, this have also instilled the dire need to develop a form of governance which includes other tribes as well.[59]

But unfortunately, it's been one year to the fall of Kabul, Taliban regime has yet to formulate its formal structure of government, the state is still governed by the interim cabinet established back in August 2021.[60] Despite of their pledges to uphold women rights, treat minority equally, not to suppress freedom of voice, they have imposed harsh interpretation of Islamic laws again. Meanwhile, United Nations has observed several violations of human rights in Afghanistan under Taliban's regime.[61] For example, they have delimited press freedom, journalists are detained, protestors who stood against their policies gone missing, Women are obstructed to work and go out without their men, women's right to education has been rolled out just as "Human Rights Watch" has noted closure of many secondary schools and Universities for girls. In addition to this, no women are included in Taliban's cabinet and no ministries are given to the group outside Taliban. The tolls of Child marriage are also higher under their regime, Afghanistan is still a safe haven for terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda, TTP and ISKP. Unpardonably, as per Human Rights Watch report Taliban intimidated, detained and even executed members of former government and ex-members of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).[62] This has wrecked Taliban's image domestically and internationally as well. Taliban must acknowledge their lessons from their downfall in 2001 to understand that they cannot rule the country dwelled in crisis without external assistance and engagement. Furthermore, to avoid confrontation it is ostensibly clear that they cannot rule by just imposing policies of banning and prohibitions only, but they must establish a government which is capable of providing services and facilities to its people.

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[59] Thomas Ruttig, *"Have the Taliban Changed?" CTC sentinel 14(13),* (Combating Terrorism Center, March 2021). https://ctc.usma.edu/have-the-taliban-changed/

[60] Andrew Walkins, "*One Year Later: Taliban Reprise Repressive Rule, but Struggle to Build a State"*, (United States Institute of Peace, August 17, 2022). https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/08/one-year-later-taliban-reprise-repressive-rule-struggle-build-state

[61] Lindsay Maizland, "The Taliban in Afghanistan", *Council on Foreign Relations,* August 17, 2022. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan

[62] "Afghanistan Event of 2021", *Human Rights Watch,* Report assessed on August 23, 2022. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/afghanistan

Understandable Concerns: Stable Afghanistan as Top Regional Priority

Two decades of failed American era and leaving the country without formulating future plan has raised many questions on US global leadership role. However, the vacuum has to be filled by other powers. In this regard the important regional actors have shown understandable concerns regarding stability in Afghanistan. Taking Afghanistan's new identity in consideration, the 20th SCO summit held in Tajikistan on 16-17 September, 2021 the main agenda of discussion was the management of situation in Afghanistan and to encourage regional support towards the war affected country.[63] On October 6, 2021 during Iranian delegation's visit in Pakistan headed by the deputy foreign minister of Iran, the two neighboring countries of Afghanistan; Iran and Pakistan pledged to coordinate as well as cooperate to bring stability in Afghanistan at bilateral and regional forums.[64] On October 20, 2021 important talks were held in Moscow specifically focused to protect country from economic breakdown and humanitarian calamity. The regional actors (China, India, Pakistan, Russia, Central Asian states) urged UN to organize conference at earliest to address the rebuilding of country as soon as possible. In these talks, Russia calls for an international aid and warned that instability in Afghanistan can spillover from Kabul across the whole region.[65] Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) acknowledged as the collective voice of the Muslim World has called 17th Emergency Meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers which was held in Islamabad on 19th December 2021. Kingdom of Saudi Arab was the biggest donor for this arrangement and conference. The main agenda of this conference was to discuss and find a way out for humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This was the need of time when the whole region is dealing with post conflict Afghanistan after US withdrawal.[66] The summit is important for all the stake holders in the region and across. As it included delegations from the P5+ 1 group of United Nations Security Council and

[63] South Asia Center, "Expert react: 2021 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tajikistan", *ATLANTIC COUNCIL,* September 22, 2021. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/experts-react-2021-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-sco-summit-in-tajikistan/

[64] APP, "Pakistan, Iran agree on close coordination for Afghan Peace, Stability"*THE NEWS,* October 6, 2021. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/897988-pakistan-iran-agree-on-close-coordination-for-afghan-peace-stability

[65]"Regional powers back aid for Afghanistan as Russia hosts Taliban", *ALJAZEERA,* October 20, 2021. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/20/russia-hosts-taliban-for-talks-but-warns-no-recognition-for-now

[66]"OIC Countries Pledge fund to stave off Afghanistan 'chaos' *ARAB NEWS,* December 20, 2021. https://www.arabnews.com/node/1989621/world

European Union.[67] On the same day, Indian government arranged conference with Central Asian states on Afghanistan issue. Since, Peace and Stability of the region is directly proportional to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Therefore, stability in Afghanistan has become top regional priority after considering the paramount importance of stable Afghanistan.

Unlocking Opportunities through Afghanistan

Afghanistan that is positioned in the middle of South and Central Asian region, can harness its potential as the "Heart of Asia" by connecting these regions. As the region of Central Asia has been isolated for decades by the war ravaged and instability in Afghanistan, from east by the inaccessible terrains of mountains and to the west by Iran. Afghanistan is the natural bridge between Central and South Asia. Connecting both the regions, besides stability, will enhance economic integration and develop infrastructure across Afghanistan.[68] If Taliban's government and regional actors succeeds to achieve the desire goal of bringing stability in Afghanistan, it has a potential to unlock many opportunities. Simultaneously, it can recover its ailing economy.

Afghanistan as the "Heart of Asia" can enable both regions to increase economic engagements and explore new markets. This can enhance trade, movement of masses and flow of different ideas between South and Central Asian regions. By harnessing this potential through Afghanistan can create new jobs opportunities for the people especially youth from both regions and decrease dependencies on remittance.[69] Keeping the landlocked nature of Central Asia and presence of two superpowers: China and Russia aiming to dominate the region as per "New Great Game", looking towards South Asian region through stable Afghanistan which states within the region are striving to achieve can enable and create new opportunities for Central Asian states. As Afghanistan has the potential to provide land corridors which will give access to Iran, Pakistan, India and Indo-pacific region. This can decrease its dependency on Russia and China. For Pakistan, stable Afghanistan has potential of providing efficient and appropriate alternative direct route to Central Asia through land which can give access of new market for Pakistan and connect with its Muslim Majority neighbors.[70]

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[67] Kamran Yousuf, "OIC-CFM: Over 24 FMs, P5 envoys confirm participation"*TRIBUNE,* December 17, 2021. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2334341/oic-cfm-over-24-fms-p5-envoys-confirm-participation

[68] Masom Jan Masomy, "Afghanistan as a Land Bridge between Central Asia and South Asia for Economic Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities" *Electronic Journal Of Social And Strategic Studies,* May 2, 2021. https://www.ejsss.net.in/article_html.php?did=9710&issueno=0

[69] Ibid

[70] Emily Carll, "An Afghanistan at peace could connect South and Central Asia"*ATLANTIC COUNCIL SOUTH ASIA CENTER,* May 18, 2021.

Additionally, Afghanistan being at the center of three regions is a home to diversified population residing within. In the North is Central Asia where ethnic Uzbek, Tajiks, Turkmen reside, in the North East is China which has ancient cultural linkages, towards East and South is Pakistan where Pashtuns and Sunni majority exist in large number, whereas towards West, Persian and Shiite community resides.[7172] Taking Afghanistan's diversified population into account, Afghanistan and its neighboring countries can utilize this aspect as an opportunity to build constructive relations based on mutual respect and shared culture which can contribute towards a diverse common future for revived Afghanistan under Taliban regime and has potential to resolve security concerns too. But it demands to be looked from practical point of view rather than theoretical to achieve regional connectivity.

Significance of Regional Cooperation and Connectivity for Afghanistan

Cooperation and connectivity among the states of any region is essential for strengthening economic, social and cultural ties. Afghanistan's incumbent regime motive to earn the trust of its neighboring countries must be its top priority as it will play significant role at unprecedented level. This cooperation has been unable to achieve due to the derailing security situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is ranked as the world's least peaceful country (163 ranked) as per Global Peace Index 2021.[73] The new Taliban government must be cognizant of the fact that to overcome these rising security challenges, which leads to economic and humanitarian crisis, requires a great deal of effort. So, concept of regional cooperation requires establishment of developing priorities through continuous coordination among the member states.[74] In case of Afghanistan, connectivity and earning support from regional countries can unlock many productive activities which

https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/an-afghanistan-at-peace-could-connect-south-and-central-asia/

[71] Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Afghanistan and its Neighbors" *United States Institute Of Peace,* June 2006. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr162.pdf

[72]"Geopolitical Analysis of Afghanistan, *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies,* April 2011. https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA12-2011_Geopolitica_AFganistan_GBBallesteros_ENGLISH.pdf

[73]"2021 Global Peace Index 15th Edition" *Institute for Economics And Peace,* June 17, 2021. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GPI-2021-A3-map-poster-1.pdf

[74] Bjorn Hettne and Soderbaum," Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges" *Goteborg University, Sweden,* accessed on December 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fredrik-Soederbaum/publication/259702507_Regional_Cooperation_A_Tool_for_Addressing_Regional_and_Global_Challenges/links/0c96052d64488eb31c000000/Regional-Cooperation-A-Tool-for-Addressing-Regional-and-Global-Challenges.pdf

can overcome the prevailing economic and humanitarian crisis in country through cooperation and coordination.[75] This can be done if Taliban regime pledge and coordinate to complete energy projects like TAPI, CASA 1000, TAP-500, transport networks like BRI, Five Nation Railway Corridor, Trans-Afghan Railway line and focus on trade and transit facilities like Special Economic Zones, Multimodal Transport and Logistics Facilities, Regional Customs and Border Management Cooperation etc. But unfortunately, Taliban's skeptical leadership and its recognition by the regional actors has remained ambiguous and has delayed the completion of these projects. If regional connectivity is achieved, it can pave for Afghanistan to have access to the region's largest market in India. It is worth mentioning that Chinese stakes and interests in Afghanistan are more as compared to Pakistan because China is asserting to expand its influence beyond the region through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Furthermore, Stable Afghanistan is pre-requisite for Chinese long-term investment in the region because Chinese economic growth and development demands energy. Afghanistan provides the shortest route for trading Middle Eastern oil specifically Iranian oil to China.[76] If this trade is hindered it can put Chinese strategic long-term goals at risk too. In addition to this, Beijing wants to secure its position in the region but Taliban regime is unable to handle the emerging crisis. That is why China has announced $31 million aid for Afghanistan.[77]Beijing also provided 200,000 US dollars to the Afghan Red Crescent Society with 18 tons of goods for the victims of Earthquake.[78] Russia and Taliban's government has officially signed oil, gas and wheat deal at a very low price to help Afghanistan out of the humanitarian and

[75] Bjorn Hettne and Soderbaum," Regional Cooperation: A Tool for Addressing Regional and Global Challenges" *Goteborg University, Sweden,* accessed on December 25, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fredrik-Soederbaum/publication/259702507_Regional_Cooperation_A_Tool_for_Addressing_Regional_and_Global_Challenges/links/0c96052d64488eb31c000000/Regional-Cooperation-A-Tool-for-Addressing-Regional-and-Global-Challenges.pdf

[76] Sharon Cho, Chen Sarah, "China Gorges on Cheap, Sanctioned Oil From Iran, Venezuela", *Bloomberg,* January 10, 2022. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-10/china-buys-more-sanctioned-oil-from-iran-venezuela-at-a-bargain

[77] Farooq Yousaf and Jabarkhail Moheb, "US withdrawal and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan: Future Policy Directions" *POLICY BRIEF,* September 7, 2021. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PB_5_2021_US-withdrawal-and-the-Taliban-regime-in-Afghanistan.pdf

[78]"China donated 18 Tons of Items and 200,000 US Dollars to the Afghan red Crescent Society To Help The Earthquake Victims!"*ARSCS,* July 04, 2022. https://arcs.af/index.php/en/china-donated-18-tons-items-and-200000-us-dollars-afghan-red-crescent-society-help-earthquake

economic crisis.[79] Pakistan on the other hand, strives to attain peace with the new leadership of Afghanistan. Since September, 2021 Pakistan provided almost 14,945 tons of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan under the umbrella of Pak-Afghan Cooperation Forum. In addition to this, Pakistan has also opened its South Waziristan border following the recent Earthquake in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been providing medical facilities and online training facilities through Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University.[80] According to Ruchira Kamboj (Permanent Representative of India to United Nations) India has delivered 40,000 metric of wheat, 36 tons of medicines, almost 500,000 doses of COVID vaccines and 28 tons of relief packages for Afghan society.[81] Kingdom of Saudi Arab granted $30 million to Afghanistan additionally in June 2022, Additionally, Qatar and Kuwait also commit to provide aid and communication to Afghanistan.[82]
It is pertinent to mention; Afghanistan's new leadership has not only been receiving aids form regional actors but also international community. According to European Commission Report assessed on December 15, 2022, European Union aid program emphasis to address food security, health and educational sector. In report, EU has more than €174 million as humanitarian support to the organizations functioning in Afghanistan and the region.[83] International donors, donated $2.4 billion to Afghanistan to prevent humanitarian collapse. Right after when United Nations appealed to urgency of crisis in Afghanistan, Germany provided $218 million and Japan donated $109 million as assistance.[84] Whereas, since August 2021, United States has provided more than $1.1 billion as humanitarian assistance and nearly $812 million from USAID with additional $320 million from the State Department.[85]

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[79] Ali Khara, "Taliban Signs 'Preliminary' Deal with Russia for Oil, Gas, Wheat" *Aljazeera*, September 28, 2022. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/28/taliban-signs-preliminary-deal-with-russia-to-buy-gas-wheat

[80] "Pakistan Spends $1b for rebuilding of war-hit Afghanistan", *Tribune,* August 03, 2022. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2369273/pakistan-spends-1b-for-rebuilding-of-war-hit-afghanistan

[81] "Afghanistan's Future Depends on Taliban's Engagement with World, But Restrictions on Women Signal Lack of International Commitments, Briefer Warns Security Council"*UNSC,* September 27, 2022. HTTPS://PRESS.UN.ORG/EN/2022/SC15038.DOC.HTM

[82] "Qatar, Kuwait Commit to Afghanistan Aid"*ARAB News,* November 12, 2022. https://www.arabnews.com/node/2198561/middle-east

[83] "Afghanistan Factsheet *"European Commission,* assessed on December 15, 2022. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/asia-and-pacific/afghanistan_en

[84] Lisa Schlein, Besheer Margaret, "Donors Pledge $2.4 Billion for Afghan Relief"*VOA News,* March 31, 2022. https://www.voanews.com/a/donors-pledge-2-4-billion-for-afghan-relief-/6510150.html

[85] "The United States Has Provided More Than $1.1 Billion To Respond To The Humanitarian Crisis In Afghanistan Since August 2021"*USAID,* September 23, 2022.

These recent engagements reveal that the Afghan people are not forgotten. Taliban government on the other hand, must acknowledge the fact that Afghanistan cannot expect to be recognized as a legitimate international community member until they provide the rights to the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, it is imperative to review the geostrategic importance of Afghanistan and how it can offer a novel pathway for growth in the field of economic, security, political and cultural domains. This will contribute to enhance growth and stability within a region. Afghanistan's new government must turn adversities into opportunities by engaging herself in wellness activities through connectivity and cooperation with regional actors. The Taliban, regional actors and international community must ensure the most basic rights for everyone living in Afghanistan: Right to live.

Conclusion

United States, after spending $2 trillion, failed to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. The abrupt American exit after two decades and complete takeover of Taliban has given rise to alarming multi-faceted economic and humanitarian crisis. The naive government of Taliban is anxious to overcome these challenges after freezing of Afghanistan's $9.8 billion assets by United States. Either it be Pakistan, China, Iran or be it Russia and Central Asian states, instability in Afghanistan has far stretched bearings across the region.

It is evident that regional actors don't want to see Afghanistan descending into long extended conflict again and bringing stability in Afghanistan even before officially recognizing Taliban's regime has become top regional priority. Therefore, important regional actors like Pakistan, Russia, China, and Central Asian states are reiterating and organizing conferences, summits to raise awareness of the emerging crisis if not dealt properly. On the other hand, the Taliban 2.0 identity is a challenge brought forward by the regional actors as they are responsible to present an induced constructed identity which is different from Taliban 1.0. Therefore, these states have been engaging and providing humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan. But not to forget, Taliban today must know, they cannot rule by just marginalizing women, imposing bans and prohibitions; they must keep in consideration that they cannot get out of the prevailing condition without external assistance. Hence, they must win the trust of regional states.

Harnessing the economic potential of the region through Afghanistan can resolve its economic and humanitarian crisis. Stable Afghanistan provides

https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-23-2022-united-states-provided-more-11-billion-humanitarian-assistance-afghanistan#:~:text=This%20additional%20funding%20brings%20U.S.,million%20from%20the%20State%20Department.

prospects for peace and economic development not only for Afghanistan but for the region as well, because the changing aspects of regional cooperation and coordination play a vital role in bringing peace and development in the region. This is worth mentioning that regional actors are playing its part, peace and development can be achieved by collective multilateralism. Hence, active regional participation through coordination can address and resolve the recent challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, and pave ways to reinforce the economic development and stability which regional actors and Taliban is striving to achieve.

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https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051

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PROHIBITION ON OPIUM POPPY CULTIVATION IN AFGHANISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF TALIBAN BAN - ITS SECURITY IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

Afghanistan is home to the largest illicit drug industry in the world. The depth, influence, and impact of its narco-economy remain unparalleled. Illicit drug production has become a dominant feature of Afghanistan's landscape. The opium economy is pervasive and deeply entrenched. Afghanistan's opium economy has become the source of security rather than the state. Therefore, the degree of dependence on the opium economy has thus become unprecedented in the modern history of drug production. The dependence means any immediate attempt toward opium poppy prohibition/eradication will result in political and socioeconomic crises not only in Afghanistan but the transit states in the region as well. In context of narco-economy, this paper expostulate that the construction of security in traditional and nontraditional discourse are linear, i.e. detached from reality or suffers from moralistic constraint, and therefore, needs to be revisited in line with ground reality of Afghanistan and transit states at large. Deviating from conventional literature on drug-security nexus, the paper argues that a complete prohibition of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is by far a larger security concern than its retention. This research paper, therefore, takes a cursory examination of the security implications and challenges that may ensue as a result of a diminished production capacity of Afghanistan's opium economy either experienced through complete prohibition, eradication programs or through natural calamity.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Opium Economy, Pakistan, Prohibition, SAARC, Security Implications**.**

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Introduction

Afghanistan has been 'off-and-on' on the international security agenda for decades now. The world's focus tends to oscillate on the decade's long conflict in Afghanistan, the narcotic dimension, however, remains a pervasive academic and security policy discourse. Although, the world became aware of the Afghanistan's mammoth narcotic production in the 1980s, however, opium cultivation and production would date back to centuries. Regional colonial experiences, Cold War rivalries and regional geopolitics were instrumental in navigating the opium economy of Afghanistan. The inter-Afghan conflict in 1990s would make the opium economy completely interwoven in the political and socio-economic fabric of Afghanistan. This interdependence makes it difficult to dissect opium production from the power and the socio-economic dynamics in Afghanistan.

For Afghans, the vast landscape of opium poppies has become the ideal commodity. It has become the most viable option for sustaining a large rural population. The opium economy, accounting for more than half of the Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)[1] provides critical human security than the state is unable to provide for.[2] A staggering 15% of the total population of the country is directly involved in poppy cultivation with another significant section of its population part of the narco-ecosystem. The drug economy also resists traditional moral philosophy of an individual's security. The ever increasing number of Afghan men and women turning to drugs consumption, provides mental security in impoverish and destructive environment.[3] Ironically, the opium economy has also led to feminist emancipation trends, witnessed in enhancing the social and economic stature of the Afghan's women cultivators. The equation is not limited to Afghanistan, but transcends its physical boundaries and has for decades also transformed the socio-economic realities of transit states in the region.

However, attempts have been made by the local as well as regional and global community to diminish the capacity of the Afghanistan's opium economy. Nonetheless, such efforts remain futile. In the decades following the post 2001 international military intervention and the attempted multilateral counternarcotics efforts with interdiction and alternative livelihood programs as its core would collapse highlighting the complexity of the opium-economy equation existing in Afghanistan. Moreover, with the virtual decline of western funds for Afghanistan's reconstruction in the post-

[1] UNODC. "*Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*." (2008): 1

[2] The drug industry now provides crucial jobs, income and security than the state is unable to provide for, a concept neglected in Buzan's societal security paradigm or the traditionalist moral security imperatives.

[3] Which in Burroughs's (2003), and De Quincey's (1898), drug addiction philosophy helps them in their transition from suffering to a spiritual plane of relief?

United States withdrawal and subsequent Taliban takeover, its socio-economic landscape has become more unstable. In the presence of decreasing social and economic opportunities, the recent Taliban announcement of the ban on opium cultivation may plunge Afghanistan into deep political and socio-economic turmoil. The crisis has the potential to produce serious security implications not only for Afghanistan itself, but for its immediate South Asian neighbors. The ban would further mean abject poverty for many Afghans, traditionally dependent on the opium-economy as a vital lifeline and a necessary component of their human security. The South Asian countries, particularly Afghanistan's immediate neighbor Pakistan, could again be confronted with a mass migration of Afghans and a dramatic increase in synthetic opioid production in the region. However, the ban on opium cultivation presents challenges; it also brings opportunities; to get rid of production, drug trafficking, and even significantly decrease drug consumption in the South Asian region. However, the western template of counter-narcotics implemented in Afghanistan for decades that failed to produce substantial results cannot be solely relied upon. The SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances regime is no different. Any framework to address these challenges should be based on the empirical realities of Afghanistan's political and socio-economic situation. It would require a condition for meaningful economic opportunities and basic human security on the ground. The South Asian countries' own individual experiences in confronting the poverty or drug eradication efforts would provide a better opportunity for a concerted approach. Regional cooperation in this context could represent the most effective means to address these challenges.

The existing pool of counternarcotics policies and security discourses in particular with nontraditional security framework constructs drug production and trafficking as a multidimensional issue that distorts political, social and economic dynamics at local, national, and transnational levels.[4] In this context, political, social and economic implications of drug production and trafficking have acquired their own individual genre with numerous subsets of fields of inquiry. The main recurring themes generated by these studies are the negative effects on public health, the economy and political stability. Moreover, in the post 2001 environment, narco financed terrorism became an overriding entry in the growing vocabulary of narco-crime nexus. Security-related discourses and counternarcotics policies have subsequently developed a grand narrative that is mostly based on the assumption of ramification and the ensuing challenges of the mushrooming Afghanistan's opium economy. The focus of the research studies or

[4] Niklas Swanstrom, "The Narcotics Trade: A Threat to Security? National and Transnational Implications." *Global Crime* 8, no. 1 (2007): 1-25.

counternarcotics policies has been overwhelmingly directed towards the examination of Afghanistan's opium economy and how to curtail its production and flow rather than addressing the root causes of the opium cultivation in the country. The opium prohibition would pose larger security implications rather than the existing challenges of the opium economy.[5] It neglects a vital element in the security dimension of opium economy; of what are its implications if it diminishes or ceases to exist? The present study, therefore, is an attempt to understand and examine how the opium ban in Afghanistan could produce security implications for the South Asian countries particularly Pakistan? The secondary focus remain on how countries within the South Asian region can integrate their efforts to not only support the Taliban initiative, but also address the structural drivers of Afghanistan's illicit drug economy – insecurity and a lack of economic alternatives.

Road to Afghanistan's Hegemonic Opium Economy

Historically, Afghanistan, both as a territorial location and as a nation-state has seen waves of foreign invasions. These invasions brought forth the leitmotif 'graveyard of empires' to be famously inaugurated with the defeat of Alexander the Great, British Empire, Soviet Union and the leitmotif is being again baptized with the withdrawal of the United States. But the leitmotif "graveyard of empires" belies its ontological and epistemological construction. The graveyard buries not only the defeating empires and armies, but per se is a graveyard of Afghanistan's own history, people and its economy. Ironically, the devastation of the political and economic order in Afghanistan has been perpetuated in the name of the peace & development. The interventionist peace framework at different phases of its history was largely conceptualized through Elphinstone's episteme, Soviet socialism, and American western democracy. However, the interventions also sowed the seeds of poppies that would epitomize the tragedy in many respects applicable to the graveyard of Afghanistan's history. In this graveyard, Alexander the Great brought the seeds of opium poppies[6]; the British Empire opium policies navigated the political and economic terrain of Afghanistan.[7] The British-India policies of annexation, political interference would restructure Afghanistan's socio-economic

[5] Barnett R, Rubin, and Jake Sherman. *Counter-narcotics to stabilize Afghanistan: The false promise of crop eradication.* (UNDP, 2008).

[6] David Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan: Opium, Outlaws and Scorpion Tales*. (Pluto Press, 2007).

[7] Hanifi, Shah Mahmoud. Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier . (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011)

landscape, leading it to emerge as a regional illicit drug production center.[8] In this graveyard, Soviet policies of scorched earth would ruin its rural economy and force more than half of its local population to increase illicit opium poppy cultivation[9]- a coping mechanism for the imminent poverty and destruction that ensued. Afghanistan hegemonic narcotics industry since 1990s onwards would further acquire a political dimension. The possession of hectares of illicit crops became the measuring unit of power for a multitude of fiefdoms populated by various competing tribal and ethnic warlords and militias in the Afghan civil war. The rapid expansion of opium cultivation and ultimately the Afghanistan's hegemonic position in global illicit drug production also partly owe to these local forces of disorder and chaos. In the post 2001 USA intervention would unclog the illicit drug production. Its subsequent state reconstruction and counterterrorism efforts, to be focused on a template of the western eradication program further coagulate Afghanistan's status as the world's principal producer of heroin.[10]

Historical Prologue to the Opium Prohibition in Afghanistan

The 2022 Taliban's ban on opium poppy cultivation[11] or post-2001 counternarcotics efforts by the Afghan government at the national and provincial level were not the first attempts to reduce opium production. The Afghan state made its first attempts at prohibition in 1945. However, despite the 1945 prohibition, opium from Afghanistan continued to be smuggled, inferring large-scale opium cultivation continued unabated. A more serious attempt was made in 1957, when Muhammad Daud Khan government announced a nationwide prohibition of opium. In the context of the historical role of opium in Afghanistan's state formation, prohibition was nonetheless strategic, rather than nationwide, i.e. as prohibition was only limited to the province of Badakhshan only. The prohibition invited serious

[8] M. Emdad-ul Haq, *Drugs in South Asia: From the Opium Trade to the Present Day.* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000)

[9] Ghanie Ghaussy, "The Economic Effects of the Soviet War in Afghanistan. , 20(1-2), 117-136." *Internationales Asien forum* 20, no. 1-2 (1989): 117-136

[10] Alfred W. McCoy, "How the Heroin Trade Explains the US-UK Failure in Afghanistan." *The Guardian*, January 6, 2018: 9. When USA invaded Afghanistan, it had to depend on anti-Taliban Afghan warlords and militias to defeat the Taliban. However, this reliance meant as Rubin (2004) remarked the opium economy was now provided with new powerful protectors.

[11] Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Ban Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan." VOA. Voice of America (VOA News), (April 3, 2022). https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-ban-opium-poppy-cultivation-in-afghanistan/6513193.html#:~:text=Afghan%20farmers%20harvest%20poppy%20in,province%2C%20April%201%2C%202022.&text=The%20Taliban%20have%20outlawed%20cultivation,85%20percent%20of%20global%20production.

challenges to the political stability of the state as Badakhshan rose in rebellion.[12] A number of unsuccessful prohibition measures were also launched in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the Soviet backed governments of *Khalq* and *Parcham*. The most effective prohibition in history of counternarcotics, however, was implemented during the Taliban first regime (r. 1996-2001) in 2000, which, according to Davis (2001) "resulted in some 70% of the world's illicit opium production being wiped out virtually at a stroke". The prohibition was later reverted few months before 9/11 as it was neither economically sustainable nor politically feasible.[13] Later, two decades of counternarcotics efforts were made by all levels of Afghanistan government. The counternarcotics efforts were supported financially and technically by USA and other western powers. However, despite spending more than 9 billion dollars from 2002 it could not totally eliminate the opium cultivation nor would diminish the drug production capacity in Afghanistan. The post 2001 counternarcotics efforts were based on a variety of prohibition strategies, that included interdiction, crop eradication-substitution programs, or the increased militarization of the 'drug war', no matter what the specific configuration, could not decrease the production or supply to Europe or the United States. The failure of counternarcotics efforts, hence, points to the highly complex nature and dynamics of Afghanistan's opium economy. The problem also points to the fact that security policies, whether counterterrorism, counternarcotics or even developmental issues has been largely conceptualized through the prism of Elphinstone episteme, or recent framework for peace and development imposed from the western template of peace and security. The episteme of the past or the framework of the present is detached from the ground realities that have existed in Afghanistan.

Obverse Reality of Security: A Case of Afghanistan's Opium Economy

The opium poppy is drought tolerant and a high-value commercial crop in Afghanistan today. With a devastated economy and society, opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan has become the only viable source of income for its population.[14] In other words, Afghanistan with its condition of extreme poverty and insecurity, opium production becomes a source of human security. The opium economy, secures the livelihood of 3.3 million people directly involved in poppy cultivation, accounting for nearly

[12] James Tharin Bradford, *Poppies, Politics, And Power: Afghanistan And The Global History Of Drugs And Diplomacy,* (Cornell University Press, 2019): 85-115

[13] The Taliban faced similar situation experienced by the previous governments in Afghanistan when a large section of the opium poppy cultivators rose in rebellion against the regime.

[14] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "PIPE DREAMS: The Taliban and Drugs from the 1990s into Its New Regime." *Small Wars*, (2021).

15 percent of the total population of the country. Moreover, a large section of the population also benefits from the narco-ecosystem. However, it's not all illicit but licit businesses have sprung around the opium production centers, including transport, tea houses and other activities are now dependent on narcotics industry. This ecosystem also extends beyond Afghanistan to the traditional transit routes in the tribal districts of Pakistan. As one interviewee remarks: [15] "social and economic deprived class has always benefited from the drug traffic in the region. The vast majority of the poor, whether they are truckers, loaders, owners of small tea shops, rest stops, etc depended on it in one way or another".

In Afghanistan's opium economy, women now play an important role in opium cultivation.[16] Surprisingly, the security emanating from opium economy has helped most oppressed and neglected segment of Afghan society gain financial freedom and a rise in social stature in a patriarchal and ultra-conservative religious environment. Views are expressed by the Afghan woman cultivator:[17]

> *It is not an illicit crop, but rather a blessing which saves the lives of my children, grandchildren and two widowed daughters. In general, it is the only means of survival for thousands of women-headed households, women and children in our villages whose men are either jobless or were killed during the war.*

The same phenomenon was witnessed in the tribal belt of Pakistan in the 1980s. A former woman cultivator in Mohmand District says[18] "for us opium poppy was not only a source of income, but financial freedom from our male relatives including spouses and male children".

In this matrix of human security, moreover, the interpretation of reality of drug addiction by the traditional and nontraditional security paradigms becomes more contested. Numerous studies have found links between armed conflict and vulnerability to drug use disorders.[19] One of the primary risk factors for rising drug use is exposure to trauma and a lack of economic prospects. In this context the decades long conflict have led 2.5 to

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[15] Ghulam Nabi, interview by author, Khyber District, April 29, 2021. The interview was conducted as part of the researcher PhD dissertation.

[16] David, Mansfield, "The Economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production: Myth and Reality---Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan." *International Conference on Drug Control and Cooperation,* (Feldafing, 2002)

[17] Ankara. "Afghan Women and Opium." The New Humanitarian, (December 1, 2015). https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/24804/afghanistan-afghan-women-and-opium

[18] Gul Bibi, interview by author, Mohmand District, April 30, 2021. The interview was conducted as part of the researcher PhD dissertation.

[19] UNODC. "*World Drug Report 2020, Booklet 5: Socioeconomic characteristics and drug use disorders*," (Vienna, 2020)

3.5 million Afghans to become directly or indirectly addicted to drugs. Research shows heightened euphoria and pleasure, bringing a feeling of supreme tranquility, peace, and a sense of security that can last for hours for opioid users.[20] In context of Afghans desolated by the conflict, drugs provide temporary escape from their predicament.[21] Another facet ignored in the human security debate is the use of synthetic vs. natural occurring drugs. Though heroin is a semi-synthetic, [22] however, the rising prevalence of the most deadly and potent synthetic methamphetamine-known as crystal meth is becoming a larger concern in Afghanistan and South Asia.

The obverse security, however, not only limited to society alone, but historically, it has helped in Afghanistan attempts for state formation or forging political control and stability.[23] In the post Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, opium became a conflict security commodity. In the absence of central government in Kabul, the quasi-state or non-state actor's drug-security approach was also principally aimed at banditry state formation. In the context of conflict, banditry is a phenomenon that is integral to the growth of markets and essential for state formation.[24] In other words, organizing a disorganized market and monopolizing strategic resources which in the case of Afghanistan was opium was the key in the attempt to form a central authority. Therefore, the 1990s was mainly characterized by a civil war fought by different warlords for the control of the territories where opium poppy was cultivated. These quasi-state authorities became even more dependent on opium production and its trafficking for revenue generation and expansion of their power base.[25]Another facet of the importance of the strategic resource i.e., in the Afghan state formation in the 1990s was that any effective prohibition would in fact derail the aforementioned attempt. The case in hand was the Taliban ban on opium cultivation in 2000.[26] However, the ban on opium was not only

[20] C Ferreiro, & D. J. Triggle, *Heroin*, (Infobase Publishing, 2009)

[21] This study should not be misinterpreted in the sense that it endorses drug abuse, as there is no denying the fact that drugs can have a devastating impact on people's lives, on the lives of their families or friends, and on the society as whole. This study is not denying that drug use poses serious risks to its users, but simply pointing to the paradox of the experience of drugs use vs. components of human security.

[22] Heroin is a derivative of morphine which itself is extracted from opium.

[23] For a detail review on how the British and global powers interacted and help transform the Afghan opium industry from local to regional to global industry, see the works of Haq (2000) and Bradford (2019).

[24] Thomas W. Gallant, "Brigandage, Piracy, Capitalism, and State-Formation : Transnational Crime from a Historical World-Systems Perspective." In Josiah McC. Hayman, *States and Illegal Practices*, (Berg, 1999): 25-62

[25] David Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan: Opium, Outlaws and Scorpion Tales*, (Pluto Press, 2007):88

[26] Why Taliban imposed the banned-on opium poppy cultivation has been a source of extensive debate. Some commenter's have argued that Taliban ban on opium poppy cultivation was to seek international legitimacy and aid. Others comment that it was an

economically infeasible but would politically weaken the Taliban regime. Besides the importance of the strategic resource in the internal state formation, it also helped the quasi-state authorities in the establishment of better local and regional linkages.[27] The drug trade has not only helped establish close ethnic links between Afghanistan and the neighboring countries, but has locally forged close cooperation between the otherwise deeply divided multiethnic society in Afghanistan.[28]

Implications of Immediate Prohibition of Opium for Afghanistan

Though opium has come to be a natural metaphor for conflict and destruction in Afghanistan, however, the opium economy is not all destructive. The central premise of traditional and nontraditional security narrative or counternarcotics policies is that opium economy has created political insecurity and social disarray in Afghanistan, however, the reality stands differently. Nevertheless, the ability of the state to totally eradicate opium poppy cultivation is not something that is impossible. Historically, the Taliban government in 2000-1 was able to eliminate illicit crops in a very short timeframe. However, their success came at very high human costs.[29] In Afghanistan, attempts were again made to curtail the opium cultivation. In the post 2001 Afghanistan landscape, NATO and UN agencies had focused their efforts on a war on drugs. The interdictions and alternative livelihood programs marred by allegations of rampant corruption and selective targeting failed to produce positive results. The failure was evident when record levels of opium production in 2014 and 2015 were registered.[30] The counternarcotics policies and strategies were customized to prevent the supply of narcotics to western countries rather than respond to its growing use within Afghanistan or the adjoining transit countries. The policies and strategies primarily unconnected to the long-term repercussions on local economies also were devoid of the socio-economic reality, which in

attempt on the part of drug syndicates having close ties with the top leadership of Taliban to dispose of old stocks and jack up the falling prices in view of the glutted market.

[27] James Tharin Bradford, "The Consequences of Coercion in Badakhshan: The 1958 Prohibition of Opium and the Issue of Culture in Drug Control Policy." In *Poppies, Politics, and Power*, (Cornell University Press, 2019): 85-115

[28] UNODC. *The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment.* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011)

[29] Corti, Daniela, and Ashok Swain. "War on drugs and war on terror: Case of Afghanistan." *Peace and Conflict Review* 3, no. 2 (2009): 41-53

[30] Behsat Ekici, "Why Does The International Drug-Control System Fail?" *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 5, no. 2 (2016): 63-90

the words of Andre D. Hollis[31] (interview by author, email, November 11, 2021):

> *The **AFGHANS** [emphasis added by the interviewee himself] wanted realistic alternative livelihoods [that would at least be feasible in drought conditions and have the potential to pay back debts]. But the Afghan Government at all levels along with their incompetent international backers failed to provide them opting instead to implement programmes dreamed up in United States, United Kingdom and other places.*

In the post Western-backed government collapse following the United States and NATO-led foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban's new government under pressure from neighboring and regional countries to combat the production as well as trafficking of drugs announced to outlaw cultivation of drugs, including opium poppy, across Afghanistan. With the already humanitarian crises developing in Afghanistan the prohibition will have the greatest effect on a large segment of Afghanistan rural population, rendering them further destitute and inexorably indebted.[32] As the economy spirals into decline, there are already reports that families are increasingly resorting to selling young girls into forced marriages. The situation is further made deplorable when the case of Afghan drug addicts is also taken. With an estimated 3.5 million addicts, accounting for nearly 10 percent of the total population, many rehabilitation centers are shutting down as foreign aid dwindles. There are several news accounts of thousands of addicts being apprehended, beaten, and marched off to prison, receiving no treatment or medication as they go through withdrawal among hardened criminals for months.[33] Despite the prohibition, drug addiction is projected to rise or be sustained as alternative sources of drugs such as synthetic opioids and methamphetamine

[31] Dr. Andre D. Hollis was a Senior Advisor to the Afghanistan's Minister for Counter Narcotics from 2010 to 2011. He previously also served as U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics. He is also an author of a chapter "Narcoterrorism: A Definitional and Operational Transnational Challenge" in the book Transnational Threats: Smuggling and Trafficking in Arms, drugs and human life (2007), ed. Kimberly L. Thachuck.

[32] A recently release report by UNDP shows a dismal picture of the extent of the crises in Afghanistan. In post August 2021 licit economy has shrank significantly, with rising inflation effecting almost 20 million people who face high and critical levels of food insecurity. Major businesses have shut-down with loss of staggering 700 jobs. For more details see UNDP, One Year in Review-Afghanistan since August 2021 (UNDP, 2022) https://www.flipsnack.com/77777E5569B/one-year-in-review-afghanistan-since-august-2021-a-socio-ec/full-view.html.

[33] Ebrahim Noroozi, "AP Photos: Despair and Poverty Fuel Drug Use in Afghanistan." *AP NEWS*. (Associated Press, July 20, 2022). https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-health-asia-pacific-poverty-kabul-a09066367bc58a934a2360dbbd0958f4.

are readily available. The situation becomes more complicated as the licit economy is projected to decrease significantly. The UNODC warns that "shrinking the licit economy can make drug markets a larger share of the national economy" and, "without alternative avenues for income generation, stimulate more illegal activities".[34] Since the Taliban took back power in 2021, international aid has been suspended, which has drastically decreased Afghanistan's legal economy and is expected to reduce the nation's GDP by 20% within the year (Westendorf 2022).[35] The record levels of hunger, persistent droughts, deteriorating health and basic services, declining employment opportunities coupled with the Taliban attempt to dismantle the illicit opium economy will exacerbate socio-economic crises. However, the crises will not be limited to the socio-economic sphere. As discussed, the opium economy has been navigating the political and conflict dynamics in Afghanistan. In post 2001 Afghanistan's political landscape, counternarcotics attempts were also cited as a major reason for the failure of western back central government to establish its control. At official level this was even conceded in Afghanistan's Government first Drug Report 2012 (Ministry of Counter Narcotics 2013, 21) that "eradication can be responsible for insecurity and loss of Government support". In the context, Felbab-Brown[36] also remarks that:

> *Counternarcotics efforts either on the part of the Afghanistan government or the U.S. and its allies would alienate a large section of the rural population dependent on opium cultivation. This in turn contributes to majority of opium poppy cultivator's sympathizing with the cause of the insurgents*.

In other words, the insurgent's namely Taliban integration into the drug trade would strengthen it politically. The 2021 prohibition on opium cultivation by the Taliban would in theory also will likely turn rural communities suffering from income loss toward its rivals, the ultra-radical

[34] UNODC. *Drug Situation in Afghanistan 2021.* Research Brief , (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021): 7

[35] From 6–11% of GDP in November 2021, the opium economy rose to 7.5–14% of GDP in 2022.

[36] Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, interview by author, Zoom, October 12, 2021. Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, is a Senior Fellow at Brookings Institution. She is considered expert on the subjects of international and internal conflicts and nontraditional security threats, including insurgency, organized crime, urban violence and illicit economies. The communication with Felbab-Brown was conducted via face to face video call interview and an extended interaction through emails. The interview was conducted as part of the researcher PhD dissertation.

Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) group. This will improve the group's ability to project threats in the region and beyond.[37]

Implications and Challenges of Afghanistan's Opium Prohibition for South Asia: A Case Study of Pakistan

With the most geographically populated region, the South Asian countries are located between the world's top two heroin producers, Afghanistan and Myanmar. As a potentially important destination market, South Asia's geographically outreach means it is also a primary trans-shipment hub of Afghanistan's opiates for international market.[38] Among the South Asian countries, Pakistan's geographical proximity to Afghanistan makes it the most significant country for analyzing the implications and challenges of the presence or attempts of prohibition on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Sharing a 2,400 km long and active border with the world's largest producer of illicit opium means knowledge of implications becomes a critical component to Pakistan's own political and socioeconomic security. Pakistan's geographical vulnerability accounts for 45% of the Afghan illicit opiates trafficked through its territory.[39] The sheer volume of the illicit drugs trafficked into Pakistan from decades has profoundly impacted and shaped its socio-economic landscape. Pakistan with almost no heroin addiction in 1979, witnessed a dramatic increase of heroin users. By 1986 the number of heroin users rose to half a million and by the time Soviet withdrew from Afghanistan almost three million. This trend continues unabated and within two decades reported to cross the five million levels.[40] The heroin addiction also witnessed a surge in the tribal space primarily concentrated along the trafficking routes. Moreover, during the Soviet-Afghan War, the Afghanistan's opium economy integrated Pakistan's apolitical tribal space with regional and international illicit drug market or the vice versa.[41] Nevertheless, the integration would escalate the opium poppy cultivation on even a larger scale in the tribal region of

[37] Both Taliban and ISK are perceived by the world as radical militant organizations, however, the two groups' objectives stands in stark contrast. While the Taliban's ideology is an amalgamation of Islamic and *Pashtunwali* code with the objective of establishing Islamic rule over Afghanistan only, the ISKP follows a Salafi-jihadi ideology governed by Islamic jurisprudence and seeks to establish a caliphate across Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran and India. Hence, any potential increase of ISK power is bound to destabilize the entire region.

[38] UNODC. *Afghan Opiate Trafficking Through the Southern Route.* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015)

[39] UNODC. *The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment.* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011): 28

[40] UNODC. *Drug use in Pakistan.* (United Nations, 2013)

[41] There are alternative accounts that it was tribal areas of Pakistan which integrated Afghanistan's drug industry to the world market.

Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan would also become the most affected provinces in terms of opiate users.[42] However, any curtailment of Afghanistan's opium economy will result in tremendous stress on the already limited infrastructure and rehab services existing in Pakistan.[43]

Moreover, as discussed Afghanistan's opium ecosystem also extends beyond its physical boundaries into the tribal space of Pakistan. The ecosystem has produced almost identical socio-economic and political security implications for Afghanistan as well as Pakistan. Therefore, any immediate prohibition attempts to dismantle the Afghanistan's opium industry have the potential to bring similar implications and challenges for Pakistan security as well. In Pakistan, one key concern is a major refugee crisis may become imminent. The Taliban decision to implement prohibition/eradication in the country without viable economic alternatives, will force the majority of the Afghan rural population into deep economic debt and desperation. In an environment of less economic opportunities, migration of the farmers and their families could swell the numbers of Afghans refugees already living in Pakistan.

Of the serious implications of immediate prohibition will be a shift of cultivation from Afghanistan in the less economically developed areas of Pakistan. A similar phenomenon has been witnessed in Pakistan tribal areas in early 2000s. The case at hand was the successful eradication program in Nangahar that registered a tremendous drop in 2004 from the opium poppy cultivation levels of 2003. This period, however, led to an intra-regional shift with the opium poppy cultivation finding fecund soil and conducive environment, literally in adjacent Khyber Agency and including regions which had never been known to grow the crop. In 2003-4 resurgence of opium poppy cultivation was reported in the tribal belt and for the first time in the Kila Abdullah and Gulistan districts of Baluchistan province.[44] Therefore, any attempt for an immediate prohibition resulting in an expected shortfall in supply of opium from Afghanistan and price hike would further induce more farmers in the tribal region of Pakistan to return or increase poppy cultivation.

Moreover, the drug trade has its own dynamics operating on the laws of supply and demand. If the supply of narcotics is disrupted, the ecosystem could adapt to new sources. In the context of Afghanistan's decades long

[42] UNODC. *Drug use in Pakistan.* (United Nations, 2013)

[43] Shazia Mehboob, "The Deteriorating State of Rehabilitation Centres and Pakistan's Reluctance to Own the Drug Problem." *Images*, (November 16, 2020). https://images.dawn.com/news/1186022

[44] Shanty, Frank C. *The Nexus: International Terrorism and Drug Trafficking from Afghanistan*,. (Praeger, 2011): 119

counternarcotics strategy, Ullah (interview by author, Peshawar, June 11, 2022),[45] argues that

> *"Afghanistan's opium economy already the main source of the world's heroin supply is on the verge of becoming a significant global producer of methamphetamine. One of the consequences of the decades long eradication policies adopted by the West in Afghanistan was it could push the expansion of the manufacture of methamphetamine and other synthetic drugs further. And if the current Taliban regime really goes through their plans and opiate production diminishes then to address the gap in supply, there is a high probability that the entire region will shift to synthetic drug production*."

In other words, the production of synthetic drugs is, however, not limited to, certain geographic locations as it can be manufactured anywhere. As synthetic drug production surged in Afghanistan during the late 2010, geography would once more pre-determine the tribal areas as the traditional transit route and Pakistan as a substantial market for Afghanistan's synthetic drugs. From 2016 onwards, Ice (crystal meth) was the third-largest substance that Pakistan's Anti-Narcotic Force (ANF) to be seized.[46] The use of synthetic drugs, particularly crystal meth or ice, has also been claimed to have dramatically increased, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa emerging as the province most afflicted.[47] The quantity of synthetic drugs being smuggled and consumed, which the local media has termed the "ice age," drove Khyber Pakhtunkhwa legislators to adopt more severe regulations to target the sellers and smugglers of ice.[48] In case where Afghanistan's capacity to produce opium becomes limited, the manufacture of synthetic opioids and meth will increase, not only in tribal districts but also across Pakistan.

In political security context, the implications of prohibition are observed with similar patterns. As Inkster, Nigel, and Comolli (2012) note that the prohibition/eradication efforts had been a major cause of violence and instability not only in Afghanistan but the transit countries as well. In

[45] Mr. Ullah is a high ranking official at the Excise, Taxation and Narcotics Control Department, who has carried out extensive research on consumption and production of synthetic drugs particularly in KP province and across Pakistan. The interview was conducted via face to face.

[46] ANF. *Anf Seized 3.98 Ton Drugs Valuing Us$ 148.75 Million Internationally In 23 Operations, Arrested 23 Culprits Involved In Drug Trafficking & Also Impounded 11 Vehicles.* Press Release , (Pakistan Anti Narcotic Force, 2020)

[47] Javed Aziz Khan, "4980kg drugs seized, 12 factories unearthed in Peshawar, Khyber in 7 months." *The News International*, (July 30, 2020).

[48] The synthetic drugs have virtually flooded the KP province including its provincial capital, leading to proliferation in addiction rates and also correlating to surging crimes across the province. In 2022, reports are still pouring in of new ice factories and opium cultivation in erstwhile tribal agencies being discovered or dismantled.

Pakistan, evidence suggests nexus of the drug trade, insurgency and violence in tribal areas.[49]

Imagining South Asia Regional Response to Opium Prohibition in Afghanistan- Gaps and Opportunities

As a geopolitical union, South Asia[50] has become a major source, destination market and transit route for the illicit drugs including heroin and synthetic drugs. The source of the illicit drugs is the South Asian region's most impoverish, conflict ridden and socially devastated country, namely Afghanistan. Many of the issues in Afghanistan are complex and long standing requiring an integrated multidimensional regional response. Since its inception, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (henceforth, SAARC) has been striving to achieve its political and economic goals of peaceful relations and economic integration amongst its members, however, such efforts remain to be materialized.[51] The prohibition attempt in Afghanistan, therefore, presents an opportunity for SAARC member states to realize its political and economic objectives as well as goal of a drug-free region. In post 2001, South Asian countries particularly Pakistan and India were already invested in counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan through bilateral, regional and international instruments.[52] In 2005, under the sponsorship of UNODC, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), underscoring the need for elimination of poppy cultivation, destruction of drug production facilities and exchange of information/intelligence on international drug traffickers.[53] India on the other hand lacking a direct land border with Afghanistan took a developmental-focused strategy to its counternarcotics engagement in Afghanistan.[54]

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[49] Gretchen Peters and Don Rassler. Crime and insurgency in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. (Military academy west point ny combating terrorism center, 2010)

[50] The geopolitical union is translated through SAARC which includes the following member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

[51] Jham Kumar Bishwakarma, and Zongshan Hu. "Problems and prospects for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)." *Politics & Policy* (2022).

[52] These measures include 2003 Paris Pact, the 2005 Memorandum of Understanding on Poppy Elimination, Border Control, and crackdowns on trafficking groups and processing infrastructure, and SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

[53] UNODC. "Afghanistan - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime," January 2006. https://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/updates/cnle_update_05.pdf

[54] To prevent Afghan farmers from growing poppies, the development strategy focused on giving agricultural technical help and supplies of vegetable seeds in Sadika Hameed, *Prospects for Indian-Pakistani Cooperation in Afghanistan*. (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2012).

However, as discussed that in the midst of economic and social insecurities, opium poppy cultivation provides a vital lifeline for many Afghans. Nevertheless, Afghanistan's opium industry for many years has also become a source of political and economic destabilization or a disruptive factor in the development of Afghanistan as well as a threat to the overall regional security. This cacophony of security/insecurity linked to Afghanistan's opium economy needs a holistic approach in the formulation of a viable counternarcotics or security policies. Moreover, the implications and challenges of the prohibition of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan should be viewed as a developmental issue and must be recognized as such.[55] The drugs and development nexus should be balanced with the conceptualization of narcotics as a transnational security concern and a conflict commodity. The prohibition of opium poppy cultivation represents an opportunity for South Asia to transform into illicit drug-free region. However, to effectively cope with the implication and challenges, existing political, social and economic ground realities in Afghanistan must be recognized by the region if not the world. Individual experiences of countries in South Asian region in counternarcotics efforts are valuable. The development and eradication programs backed by the UN and other development organizations contributed to a diminishing trend of drug cultivation and production in Pakistan.[56] Since 2001 Pakistan would follow a 'zero tolerance policy' toward poppy cultivation on its territory. The cultivation of opium poppy in Pakistan would largely decline during the 1990s to near-zero levels in 1999 and 2000.[57] The strategy would be two-pronged centering on alternative development and law enforcement measures, was incredibly successful, almost completely eliminating poppy cultivation in Pakistan. However, the magnitude of the implications and challenges that would result from any attempt to prohibit opium poppy cultivation and production is beyond Pakistan's political and economic capacity. In this context, a regional solution will be the most viable.

In the context of illicit drugs free region, free of their production, processing, trafficking and use, the South Asian regional response is primarily channeled through the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (henceforth, Convention). However, the scope of the Convention is largely restricted to legislative and administrative measures with an overwhelming emphasis on eradication and interdiction activities in 'producer' and 'transit' states, imposing disproportionate costs on its member countries. The Convention emphasizes the individual responsibility of each member country rather than a collective approach.

[55] Julia Buxton, "Drugs and development: The great disconnect." *Policy Report* 2 (2015): 12

[56] Development programs were often completed through continual discussion and cooperation with tribal leaders. For more details see Gillett (2001) and Windle (2012).

[57] UNODC. *Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan.* United Nations, 2008

Though the Convention is cognizant of the "links between illicit drug trafficking and other related organised crimi- nal activities, which undermine the economies and threaten the stability, security and sovereignty of States" however, it does not offer any economic and political solutions. On counternarcotics efforts, although there remains limited scope for collaboration beyond information sharing and cooperative measures through SAARC, future cooperation should remain a possibility. As Hameed (2012) argues "implementation of antidrug cooperation remains a challenge, but there are enough common interests in the region to cooperate on drugs".

Conclusion: Recommendations for South Asia Regional Approach towards Prohibition in Afghanistan

In conclusion the curtailment of the drug industry has profound implications for state, societal and individual security not only for Afghanistan but the connected regions at large. However, this aspect of security has not been explored in-depth and seems to form a narrow niche in the security discourses on Afghanistan's opium economy. The study, therefore, was a modest attempt to examine some of the security challenges that may arise as a result of complete prohibition of opium poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan. In the light of some implications examined, the research study concludes with a set of rudimentary recommendations for regional framework aimed at strengthening cooperation within South Asia to effectively cope with any prospects of curtailment of Afghanistan's opium economy. The research study suggests the following:

1. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) needs to develop a broader consensus on accepting the political reality in Afghanistan. This would require extending some form of political reorganization to support a Taliban government in its prohibition efforts.
2. The prohibition attempts in Afghanistan should be extended to the level of a regional ownership.
3. The member states of SAARC should pool funds for the reconstruction of Afghanistan with major input from the regional financial powerhouse India to continue to invest in the infrastructure and development projects.
4. The prohibition should be phased wise program rather than abrupt imposition with socio-economic cost. Those areas where prohibition is scheduled can also be ratified through its recognition as legit commodity since the world demand for medicinal opium exceeds the Afghanistan's annual opium output.
5. The current economic crises in Afghanistan have been exacerbated by the freeze of funds by international community. Lacking strong external funding, the government dominated by the Taliban, may

collapse. This will lead to further conflict and its drug economy becoming more entrenched. Therefore, SAARC needs to work with the international community to help unfreeze the funds and particularly make it available for development and prohibition efforts.

6. SAARC should critically reflect on the limitations of the Convention and incorporate feasibility of development objectives within a prohibition oriented drug control framework. It should further help Afghanistan in rehabilitation and treatment, preventive education, and research to help combat illicit drug abuse.
7. The need to reduce poverty and foster development should be central to SAARC strategies for drug control. SAARC too should promote alternative sources of livelihood for people who are expected to be adversely affected by the curtailment, and eventually, stoppage of drug production. Collective regional efforts to develop alternative livelihoods should be integrated into overall economic and human capital development program. Such efforts must include both rebuilding Afghanistan's rural economy and generate off-farm opportunities.
8. Improving substance abuse prevention and treatment access for Afghans suffering from opioid use disorder should be prioritized in policy and funded far more broadly than has been the case so far.

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METAPHOR USED BY THE US AS A LETHAL WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION AGAINST THE OTHER FOR PURSUING ULTERIOR MOTIVES

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Abstract

To get access to the resources-rich central Asian states and to nip in the bud the state of Afghanistan, that had proclaimed itself under the Taliban regime to be a state run solely under the ideology and system of Islam- the next threat to The US after the socialism-the US, after the 9/11 incident, took resource to using the linguistic weapon of metaphor before and along the surgical strikes and managed to beset the thoughts of every individual on the globe. It was successfully used as a justification to approve finances from the US Parliament for mongering an uncalled for war, to enlist moral support of its citizens by means of instilling fear in them, to elicit active financial and personnel support of its European allies and to silence the international community from raising its voice against the attack. It is the domain of cognitive linguistic where these conceptual metaphor, or cognitive metaphor, are used to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. This study focused on identifying the conceptual metaphors used in the War on Terror discourse for influencing opinion against the enemy and dehumanizing it. Metaphors are used in the conceptual domain of covering the false ideas of the US and influencing the world to manipulate and pursue their ulterior motives. There actual motive was to get the justified war on terror as legal and the only source of getting away with it. They influenced the world with their justified war on terror policy and gained their motives.

Keywords: Metaphor, Weapon, War on Terror, Discourse, Destruction

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Introduction

The 9/11 incident has changed the world upside down; it has changed everything, everywhere and everyone. The world has become a laboratory for the west to test and make the distinction in the human beings. Western Politics have reached a conclusion to draw a line in the world through their spoken words as well as their decisions. The very first thing they did was the use of Metaphors. Metaphors were used as lethal weapons of mass destruction. Phrases like, 'axis of evil, time ticking bombs, uncivilized world, enemies of light and development. Such phrases have been introduced in the political speeches of the worlds' most prominent leaders like George W. Bush and Tony Blare, and followed by Barrak Obama. It was a time that they started stopping the violence in society by considering humans as inhuman and barbaric. They called the enemy barbaric, cancer, uncivilized and something very harmful needed to be washed out from the society. 9/11 was an incident followed by so many horrible and inhumane acts of mass destruction. Western goals and motives kept in priorities and the rest were sent to hell.

The attack on the world trade centre has made the US to re design their strategies for the world more to be ruled by the spoken world instead of bombing or pushing the tanks. They tried their level best to develop such a strong narrative that should justify the killing of others for them. They could do that only with the help of conceptual metaphors to dehumanize the enemy other. That could a rat, that must be destroyed, that could be a cancer, that needs to be healed, or that could be a violence must be stopped. Such stories were developed and covered with such conceptual metaphors that lead them ensue the war on terror. Different sources and internet genres have been used to manage and develop such constructed discourses to give voice to strongly disputatious discourse or strong persuasive speeches of the civilized world's most prominent leaders. The current subject deals with the use metaphors by the US as a lethal weapon of mass destruction against the other for pursuing ulterior motives. The art of being influential speakers of the modern world made them the most heard leaders of the western world.

Literature Review

"WAR ON TERROR" is a subject most studied and discussed on every platform from different perspectives very vividly in the last three decades but no exact work is done so far to view the linguistic performance of the world's leaders and its influence on the world. The work is basically based on the use of conceptual metaphors in the war on terror discourse. It's the very first step that these metaphors are being filtered to highlight the lies covered by the world's leader under these metaphors. These metaphors are used as

lethal weapons of mass destruction by the US against the others for pursuing ulterior motives. Conceptual metaphors played an important role in the construction of the enemy other to be battled in a justified war on terror. This cycle of violence ensued right after the incident of 9/11. It was clicked right after that these metaphors be analyzed critically and must be investigated that how they are accepted so abruptly without giving a second thought. The analysis must be made to vividly understand the covered lies under these metaphors spoken by the most accepted leaders of the world. We witnessed some cases that how did we get these metaphors, it is through a systematic, planned discourse developed after the 9/11 attack. Media outlets, English movies, cartoons, speeches, talk shows, computer games, political cartoons, so many and so forth. They used every modern means of communication to influence the world through these metaphors to get their motives. They first of all tried to develop a language that must be metaphorically structured and cover their lies behind it and justify the killing of these constructed enemies. Metaphors become more natural and common with its use in dominant discourse and no critical consideration on the behalf of the receivers, and reflect the world more purely. Metaphors not only make the ideas attractive but they are also powerful tool for the writer to represent the point of view in a persuasive way according to the intended purpose.

Orientalism by Edward Said: Said has very clearly and vividly challenged the oriental concept of the western world. They have so forcefully divided the world in two poles. It is totally an act of extreme pride and an unacceptable attempt of the west for the world. Said called it a manmade division. The western powers have divided the world in two and called on the civilized as we and the uncivilized as Orientals. The very concept of Oriental by the west is biased and based on partial analysis of the world. The idea of Orient for Said, has codified history, specialists, imagery, vocabulary and repetition through which it has constructed a reality for the West by the West.

Culture and Imperialism by Edward Said: Said explained the importance of Culture and its role in the imperial powers. How culture contributes in the making of empires. He took the British and France empires and their colonial systems. How did they represent it through literature and many other genres to manipulate the world and influence their minds. Showing their culture the best and making a model to the world. it is culture that influence others and manipulate the minds of others. The great

Britain and France took a lead in cultural hegemony and cultural imperialism. It is culture that makes an empire. .

In daily life communication people use metaphors. Metaphors are literally used to embellish the thoughts. Most of the time we use metaphors without knowing we are using them. Lawler, Lakoff and Johnson are of the openion that metaphors not only affect the way of communication but they also give a proper shape to our feelings and judgments. Lakoff and Johnson suggest a fascinating guidance by bringing linguistic and philosophical perspectives together to the common metaphors and what we can think about human mind.[1]

This act is now vividly accepted that the understanding of metaphors in the last twenty years has become vital. Firstly with Lakoff and Johnson's the most important work" Metaphors We Live By, Kovecses outlines the development of "the cognitive linguistic theory of metaphor" by explaining key ideas on metaphor. He also explores primary metaphor, metaphor systems, the "invariance principle," mental-imagery experiments, the many-space blending theory, and the role of image schemas in metaphor.

Analyzing Political Speeches; rhetoric, discourse and Metaphor": by Jonathan Chartteris-Black: The attempt is made to evaluate the political speeches from different approaches, as theoretical approaches ranging from classical rhetoric to contemporary approaches such as the discourse-historical approach and critical metaphor analysis. The analyses are made to understand how traditional approaches of classical rhetoric may be integrated with modern 'critical' approaches such as critical metaphor analysis. Readers will have the full understanding of the discourse theories that account for relationships between the linguistic features of speeches and the social and cultural contexts where they are spoken.

The World, the Text and the Critic by Edward Said: Said's concept of a Text is that "every text is settled in the world where it has some sort of affiliations with the vas aspects of the global world. Its political, its social as well as its cultural affiliations are found in the world. Every text is different from any other text available in its particular context. While giving the example of a literary text, Said is of the opinion that every literary text, for example, is to be interpreted differently from the canonical lines of English literature alone as such a view will cut the text of the political action in the text and will leave no space for the judgment of the text worldliness of the author who writes it and the critics who read it.

There I found this most readably analyzed book in the post colonialism named, "Heart of Darkness" written by Joseph Conrad. The novella is set in Africa where the European colonialism has been criticized and their treatment of the African people just because of their color of the skin. Where

[1]Ibid.

the only source of happiness was to be successful whether that is in war or in business. Humans were ill treated and were demonized to justify their killing. The economic exploitation of the Africans was justified by associating them with animals or skunk of the world. They represented Africa as "the other world". an image of Africa. Africa was attributed to a world where the uncivilized abode and the white Europeans as civilized and their lords.

Research Methodology &Theoretical Framework

The subject has intended to foresee the use of metaphors used in the war on terror discourse with the intentions of investigating their role in dehumanizing the enemy other. The theory has been picked to investigate through Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) that how these metaphors are used as lethal weapons of mass destruction against the other for pursuing ulterior motives. Investigating the role of these metaphors, firstly the Orientalists construction of the Other is explained in the light of Orientalism.

Western construction of the very colonial set up for the world was wrapped in the idea of 'Orientals'. Said considered this colonial concept of Orientalism as, "Western dominating, restructuring, constructed world for the orients". The world was divided in two poles, the civilized and uncivilized, the free and the slaves, the modern and barbaric, the good and the bad, the enemy of light and the light itself. Structuring a world where the west remains dominant and the orient as wicked and chained. Edward Said considers orientalism *"as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" which is Europe's "most recurring image of the Other"*(Said 2003).

Since their constructed orients, these descriptions were systematized grouped into a controlled body of existence and identity. The metaphor of identity and ideology were repeated so frequently that they appeared like the true identity and knowledge of the orientals. Said believes that though today Currently there is an indirect colonization; it can be seen through the lenses of metaphors. How these western political leaders treat the orientals and how they associate the meaning of war on terror with them. The developed discourse by the west has always presented the orientals as inferior, barbaric, uncivilized, ill mannered, savage and the enemy of light. They have been metaphorically presented as the axis of evil, time ticking bombs, the enemy of light and violent creatures. The developed discourse of Orientalism

unfolds the relationship between the East and West. The relationship; where the west considers itself superior in opposition to the inferior east. The division of the world has been made by the west into two unlikely different poles for dominance and power practice.

The article is an attempt to highlight that how metaphors are used in the war on terror discourse by the US as a lethal weapon of mass destruction against the other for pursuing ulterior motives. This paper is basically looking into the conceptual metaphors used in the war on terror discourse to demonize the enemy other. It is an attempt to investigate that how conceptual metaphors are used to cover the lies of the western political leaders to ensue the war on terror and justify the killing of enemy other. The researcher will try to prove that how simple issue of terrorism turned into the most complex issue through these metaphors. How these metaphors are used to justify the killing of enemy. How they presented these enemies to the world and how they may be treated. Metaphors of disease and violence are used as if they may be treated to save the world from its harm. The world may be protected in the better interest of the west. They set the world accordingly. It was the system of these metaphors that helped them achieve their ulterior motives and turned out as the saviors and protector of the world.

The analysis has been carried out qualitatively on the selected data from the already available discourse on different genres of media. The data has been investigated thoroughly to pick metaphors used to demonize the enemy. The data was collected from the speeches of the world's most prominent leaders; George W. Bush and Toy Blare delivered after the 9/11 attack. The analysis presented in this research thesis is far from exhaustive. I have attempted to cover quite a long time span of speeches on a relatively small discourse and in a 12 selected ones For reference, see Remarks by the president in the joint session of congress and American people from September 20, 2001, Remarks by the President at his speech to the nation on September 11 2001, or Remarks by the President In Announcement of Lessons of Liberty Initiative at Thomas Wotton High School Marry Land in October 2001, so there are many points that could be expanded upon. Moreover, the work is only a qualitative analysis of the developed discourse after the 9/11 incident, so an analysis from a quantitative point of view (concerned e.g. with the frequency of the individual conceptual metaphors or the resonance of source domains) should be the next area that have yet to be touched upon. Nevertheless, the thorough analysis and interpretation of the most significant conceptual metaphors concerning dehumanization of the enemy in the War on Terror discourse as well as description of their development over the eight-year span offers a clearer view of the underlying political principles and ideologies of the War on Terror policies of George W. Bush's administration.

Metaphors as Lethal Weapons of Mass Destruction

1. Disease Metaphors

Within the large conceptual key of SOCIETY IS A HUMAN, Bush's administration decided for the use of another negatively charged conceptual metaphor when talking about the extremist groups and that is the metaphor TERRORISM IS A DISEASE. Since disease in its literal sense is a negative phenomenon that affects a human body and prevents it from working normally, the conceptual metaphor TERRORISM IS A DISEASE allows seeing the rather abstract notion of terrorism as a deadly threat to the society and its future. The disease is similar to the concept of terrorism being uncivilized, as both are something one cannot reason or negotiate with.[2] In the two following examples (as well as in several others below), the threat of terrorism is conceptualized as a disease that is hard to contain or eradicate – cancer: NETWORK OF DEATH, TERRORISM IS A CANCER.

> *"Prayer has comforted us in sorrow, and will help strengthen us for the journey ahead. I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it." (Bush 64)*
> *"But as we look to the future, one issue risks a cycle of conflict that could derail so much progress, and that is the cancer of violent extremism that has ravaged so many parts of the Muslim world. Now, it will take time to eradicate a cancer like ISIL." (Obama)*

However, president Obama highlights also some positive concepts within this negatively loaded conceptual metaphor: the ability of the American nation (human) to resist this disease of violent extremism, as it is immune to threats and fear terrorists spread:

> *"Great harm has been done to us. We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment. Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us. Our nation -- this generation -- will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future. We will rally the world to this cause by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail". (Bush 65)*

[2] (Spencer, 2012, p. 409)

The implied fact that the terrorism (disease) must be destroyed completely for the society (human body) to heal and begin functioning in a normal way again serves the purpose of justification for the actions executed as part of the War on Terror strategy. The conceptualization of the terrorism as uncivilized is being highlighted every now and then to pave the ways for their so called dehumanization agenda.

2. Violence Metaphors

The metaphorical expressions that are used by President Bush to negatively evaluate terrorism through the source domain of violence provide the evidence for two conceptual metaphors: TERRORISM IS UNCIVILIZED and TERRORISM IS A VIOLENT CRIME. FACELESS COWARDS.WILD ANIMALS, SKUNK, and BRUTAL

The first conceptual metaphor, TERRORISM IS UNCIVILIZED, is conceptually related to the previously mentioned conceptual metaphor TERRORISTS ARE WILD ANIMALS. In both cases the nature of the extremists is associated with the notions of being inherently primitive and uncontrollable. Alongside the primary meaning of uncivilized as primitive, the word also evokes the negative concepts of brutality, cruelty, savagery and aggression. The TERRORISM IS UNCIVILIZED metaphor is therefore used by Bush to highlight the exceedingly violent natures and actions of the terrorists. Their intentions are barbaric and the guilt of murders of so many people, including American hostages, are a desperate and revolting attempt to strike fear in the hearts of people it can never possibly win over by its ideas or its ideology – because it offers nothing but misery and death and destruction to the brutal and the network of terror.

> *"Afghanistan's people have been brutalized -- many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough." (Bush 67)*

As Ivie points out, the portrayal of the enemy as savage ―contrasts the civilized victim's rationality, morality, and peaceful purposes with the irrational and immoral behaviour of the uncivilized aggressor.[3] Obama uses this contrast to strengthen the emotional reaction to terrorism. The following example illustrates this use:

[3] Joshua Spencer, Ways of Being. *Philosophy Compass*, 7(12), (2012): 406. doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2012.00527.x

> *"It is time for a new compact among the civilized peoples of this world to eradicate war at its most fundamental source, and that is the corruption of young minds by violent ideology."*

In addition to the above mentioned, it is important to note that the terms ―barbaric and ―barbarian that are often used within the concept of TERRORISM IS UNCIVILIZED come from the Greek word barbaros meaning foreign. As Spencer (2012) points out this metaphor then constitutes the terrorism not only as something other but as something explicitly foreign and thus de-westernizes the terrorist actors.[4] It also strengthens the notion of us vs. them, which can lead to the simplistic dualistic view of the conflict between the terrorists and their opponents.
There is no doubt about terrorism being an unlawful use of force or violence in furtherance of political or social objectives, at least in the Western perception of the phenomenon. The criminal, in this case the terrorist, does not adhere to rules and has to be punished in some sort of way,[5] preferably within the rule of law.

> *"Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world -- and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere". (Bush 68)*

Nevertheless, although the conceptual metaphor TERRORISM IS A VIOLENT CRIME is by definition true, it also helps to better understand the terrorism and the US engagement in its battle against it. As Lakoff (2014) suggests, this is possible mainly because this metaphor conceptualizes the terrorism only in terms of its moral dimension and highlights those aspects of terrorism that would otherwise be seen as major crimes, such as murder, kidnapping or rape.[6]
George. W. Bush talks about the terrorists as mass murderers who

> *kill in the name of God "slaughter the innocent and cower in caves", "murder innocents on a horrific scale", "murdered thousands of people from dozens of countries",* and are *―determined to kill as many Americans as they possibly can."(69)*

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[4] Joshua Spencer, Ways of Being. *Philosophy Compass*, 7(12), (2012): 408 doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2012.00527.x
[5] Ibid. 404
[6] Lakoff, "*Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf*." (2014): 8

Although the particular crimes committed in the name of terrorism are very similar to those committed during war, the main difference is that the conceptualization of terrorism as a crime and not war calls for a judicial rather than a military response.[7] The following metaphorical expressions from the analyzed discourse exemplify that this conceptualization was often engaged by Bush and his allies:

> *… and we are doing the hard work of forging a framework to combat extremism within the rule of law.*
> *"We will bring justice to those who harm our citizens and our friends, and we will stand with our allies."*
> *"Any responsible individuals, any responsible groups will feel the full weight of justice. We lead coalitions of countries to uphold international norms."*
> *"I also want to make it clear that the doctrine I laid out to the United States Congress is a doctrine this nation will enforce. It says clearly that if you harbor a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, if you provide sanctuary to a terrorist, if you fund a terrorist, you are just as guilty as the terrorist that inflicted the harm on the American people."(Bush 70)*

On the other hand, the military involvement of the US in this conflict is never addressed as any of the above mentioned violent crimes. The violence used by the US army or government is portrayed as necessary and therefore justified, since the US is the rational actor. The terrorists, on the other hand, are the irrational actors motivated by their instincts rather than reason. Obama's counterterrorism metaphorical expressions within the source domain of violence can be therefore categorized under the conceptual metaphor ERADICATION OF EVIL IS ANY MEANS NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL.

Discussion

The two foremost leaders of the civilized world approached this issue of terrorism very subjectively, comprehensively and turned out goal oriented. They both acknowledged this fact and were found that war on terror metaphors were grouped together according to the source domain. They set the target and they were very strict in achieving it. The conflict, morality, journey, building, human being, fire, darkness were much related to everyday experiences of their target domain and source domain of demonization.

[7] (Spencer "*Creativity,culture and education*. 2012,)

They both played smartly. This intelligent play of the used metaphors made Bush as well as his allies to create a coherent and comprehensive framework when addressing the issues of terrorism and War on Terror. The thing both strong allies share when it comes to their War on Terror rhetoric is the praise of the traditional American values, such as human rights, freedom and justice.

Furthermore, none of them, neither Bush nor Tony Blare tried to give it a religious domain. Both of them used religion as a source domain of conceptual metaphors. It is a fact that religion is one of everyone's traditional values and this domain was employed by Bush frequently. The fact is that both these leaders to associate terrorism with religion. As religion is everyone's important traditional value and everyone is less or more connected to it, may work achieving our target domain. They both associated terrorism with the religion Islam. Islam and Muslims were metaphorically presented as skunk and the enemy of the world. Though bush often emphasizes in his speeches that the US is not at war with Islam, but with the violent extremism that has perverted this religion. By avoiding the use of the religious metaphors when addressing the War on Terror efforts, they both tried many a times to spread the negative stereotypes and the simplistic view of the world.

Bush's and Blair's conceptual metaphors also confirmed a certain development in their intensity, strength and emotional appeal. While their discourse concerning War on Terror was quite aggressive and negatively oriented (especially in comparison to the other leaders, the intensity and the type of the conceptual metaphors used was changing depending on the given political reality. Their usage of metaphors was more intense and conflict-oriented and they conceptualized terrorism as negative and evil phenomenon when the threat of terrorism was on the rise. These changes in intensity as well as the use of metaphors can be observed especially in the speeches after the attacks on 9/11, the speeches concerning the War on Terror after the plane crash in WTC, or the continuing rise of the issue with Iraq WMD. Nevertheless, Bush's conceptual metaphors always stayed boiling point: he consistently triggered the negative stereotypes as well as creating the picture of absolute war between good and evil.

Conclusion

The US after the 9/11 incident, took resource to using the linguistic weapon of metaphor before and along the surgical strikes and managed to beset the thoughts of every individual on the globe. US President left no stone unturned to use metaphors to justify the killing of Taliban. The Talibans were those whom they called Taliban none other. They used metaphor as a lethal weapon of mass destruction. It was

successfully used as a justification to approve finances from the US Parliament for mongering an uncalled for war, to enlist moral support of its citizens by means of instilling fear in them, to elicit active financial and personnel support of its European allies and to silence the international community from raising its voice against the attack.

Since metaphors played a ground breaking role in getting the war on terror ulterior motives for the US, it has won a great reputation for both these great allies of the western world among its masses. The American public was manipulated by these metaphors: and were influenced by Bush to justify its war on terror. Apart from killing the innocent lives and getting their resources, there is one big lie and that lie is that they lied to their own people. Metaphors were used as lethal weapons of mass destruction. Phrases like, 'axis of evil, time ticking bombs, uncivilized world, enemies of light and development. Such phrases have been introduced in the political speeches of the worlds' most prominent leaders like George W. Bush and Tony Blare, and followed by Barrak Obama. It was a time that they started stopping the violence in society by considering humans as inhuman and barbaric. They called the enemy barbaric, cancer, uncivilized and something very harmful needed to be washed out from the society. 9/11 was an incident followed by so many horrible and inhumane acts of mass destruction. Western goals and motives kept in priorities and the rest were sent to hell.

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